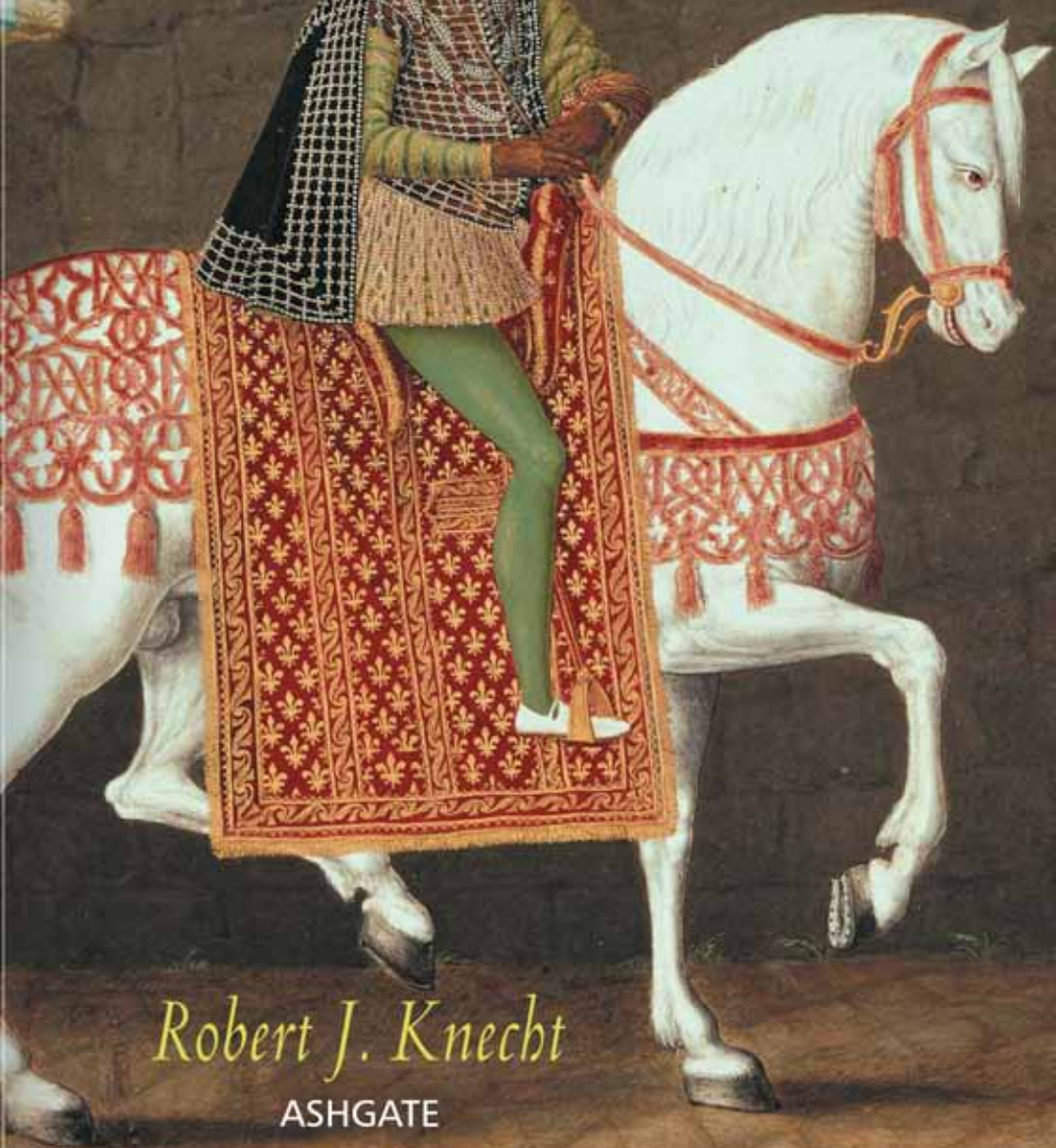


*Hero or Tyrant? Henry III,
King of France,
1574–89*



Robert J. Knecht

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HERO OR TYRANT?
HENRY III, KING OF FRANCE,
1574-89

To Maureen

Hero or Tyrant?
Henry III, King of France,
1574–89

ROBERT J. KNECHT
University of Birmingham, UK

ASHGATE

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to bring to the notice of English-speaking readers a French monarch who is fascinating for several reasons. As a man, he had a complex personality combining reclusiveness with a passion for display and extremes of religiosity; as king, he changed the nature of the French monarchy by more or less fixing his court in Paris and giving it a code of etiquette that emphasized his authority. He upset many people by departing from the easy accessibility his predecessors had cultivated. He also ruled with the help of male favourites who became known as his *mignons*. In the course of his short life (he died at the age of 38) Henry witnessed and at times participated in some of the most dramatic events of the century, including the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Acclaimed as a Catholic hero in the early stages of the French religious wars, he came to be reviled as a crypto-heretic later on. Few rulers have been subjected to such an onslaught of abuse. Denounced as a tyrant by preachers, he was also reviled in countless printed pamphlets. To a degree this was self-inflicted, for Henry invited criticism by his strange behaviour which combined a love of extravagant display with bouts of religious penitence. He also made catastrophic blunders which horrified his more politically astute mother, Catherine de' Medici. The worst was in 1588 when he tried to extricate himself from a political impasse by ordering the murder of the third duc de Guise, a popular Catholic hero, and his brother, who was a cardinal. By so doing he aroused the fury of the Parisians and the wrath of the papacy. Threatened with excommunication, he was assassinated by a Jacobin friar. He was the first French king to suffer this fate since Merovingian times. As Henry had no son, his death marked the end of the Valois dynasty. His nearest male heir was the Protestant leader, Henry of Navarre, who belonged to the house of Bourbon. He became King Henry IV following his conversion to the Catholic faith.

Henry III's reputation has fluctuated across the centuries. In the seventeenth century and most of the eighteenth he was more or less eclipsed by the renown accorded to his successor, Henry IV. The Bourbons had no time for the Valois. Mézeray in his *Abrégé historique* (1715) described Henry III's reign as 'the favourites' reign'. They had 'persuaded him not to commune with his subjects

as much as his predecessors had done, but to conceal himself like an oriental monarch'. Louis Mainbourg in his *Histoire de la Ligue* (1683) contrasted the qualities of leadership Henry had displayed as duc d'Anjou with the idleness into which he sank following his return from Poland in 1574. He subsequently made himself odious and contemptible in the eyes of his subjects by his bizarre and fickle behaviour. 'He went from debauchery to piety by holding processions and penitential exercises that were seen as hypocrisy; then from piety to debauchery in the form of certain ridiculous amusements and in a thousand frivolous pursuits wholly unworthy, I will not say of a king, but of a reasonable man.' In the second decade of the nineteenth century Henry III appeared in several works of historical fiction though usually overshadowed by his mother, Catherine de' Medici. Vitet, in the preface to his play on the Day of the Barricades (1826), wrote of him: 'Alongside exercises of the most punctilious piety, he indulged in excesses of debauchery of the most revolting kind.' The Romantic age in general did not treat Henry kindly. Under the influence of Sir Walter Scott, historical fiction enjoyed a boom in early nineteenth-century France. Balzac and Prosper Mérimée dabbled in the genre, but it was Alexandre Dumas who captured an international readership. Though fiction was his métier, he had a real sense of history and first-hand knowledge of the main literary sources.

In 1941, the historian and politician, Pierre Champion published the first volume of a biography of Henry III covering the years 1551–71. Three more volumes followed, including two on Henry as King of Poland, but the author died in 1942 leaving his work unfinished. Following the Second World War, historical biography came to be despised by French academic historians. Their attitude was conditioned by the so-called *Annales* school who viewed political history as inferior to economic and social history. They did not neglect man, but preferred to study him as part of a group rather than as an individual. Thus Pierre Goubert wrote a book on *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen*. But in the last 20 years or so there has been a reaction. Historical biography has regained respectability among serious historians as long as it is based on a sound knowledge of the primary sources, both archival and literary. Henry III has been one of the main beneficiaries of this reaction. In 1985 Pierre Chevallier published a substantial biography bearing the sub-title: 'the Shakespearian king'. Since then, Jacqueline Boucher, Nicolas Le Roux and Xavier Le Person among others have revolutionized our understanding of the king and his reign. Monique Chatenet has focused attention on Henry's court reforms. Among British scholars, Keith Cameron has illuminated the satirical iconography of his reign, and, drawing on a large corpus of primary sources, Mark Greengrass has shown how debates on

reforming the kingdom sponsored by the king among its elites impacted on the Bourbon monarchy. In the United States, Mack Holt has unravelled the fraught relationship between Henry III and his younger brother, François, duc d'Anjou. Henry can now be judged dispassionately within a context illuminated by the writings of Denis Crouzet and his disciples. Unfortunately, their contributions are unknown to most English-speaking readers. The only biography of Henry III in English – that of Martha Walker Freer – dates from 1858! My own biography is an attempt to bring the story up-to-date and to fill a void. I am grateful to Nicolas Leroux and David Potter for much useful advice and, above all, to my wife whose constant support has made this book possible.

Note

Henry III's nomenclature can be confusing. Christened Édouard-Alexandre, he was confirmed under the name 'Henri' in 1564. In accordance with the normal practice of anglicizing regnal names, I shall call him Henry III as from his accession to the French throne in 1574.

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Chapter 1

Childhood

The people of Marseilles had good reason to feel excited on the morning of 11 October 1533 for no less a person than Pope Clement VII was due to arrive in the city that day. The purpose of his coming was political rather than religious: it was to seal an accord with King Francis I of France. The Holy See had originally sided with his arch-rival, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, but after Francis's defeat and capture at the battle of Pavia in 1525, it had drawn closer to France as the lesser of two evils. Francis was keen to recover the duchy of Milan which he had lost in 1522. In order to achieve this, he needed to gain the co-operation of the Holy See. Clement was ready to oblige. But Clement's coming to France was not simply to sign a treaty; it was also to seal it matrimonially. A marriage had been arranged between his young cousin, Catherine de' Medici, and Francis I's second son Henri, duc d'Orléans.¹

As signals fired from the château d'If and Notre-Dame de La Garde announced the imminent arrival of the pope's flotilla, small boats, carrying a host of noblemen and musicians, set off to meet it. Clement's arrival was greeted by salvoes from three hundred shore batteries and by a general ringing of church bells. Anne de Montmorency, the Constable of France who had overseen the elaborate preparations for the pope's reception, sailed in a frigate to the centre of the harbour whence, after welcoming Clement, he led him to 'the king's garden' situated close to the abbey of Saint-Victor. Here the pope was greeted by his legate, cardinal Duprat, and other prelates. Early next day, the pope made his entry into Marseilles. Seated on his portable throne, he was preceded by a white horse carrying the Blessed Sacrament in a casket. Clement was followed first by the cardinals riding in pairs, then by Catherine surrounded by a brilliant suite of lords and ladies.²

On Monday 13 October King Francis I made his own entry into Marseilles accompanied by his queen, princes of the blood, high court dignitaries and a military escort. He then called on the pope. After he had prostrated himself at

¹ Robert Jean Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 299–302.

² Le P. Hamy, *Entrevue de François Ier avec Clément VII à Marseille, 1533* (Paris, 1900).

the feet of the Holy Father, the two men got down to business. On 27 October the contract for Catherine's marriage was signed, and, next day, she and Henry were married amidst great pomp. That night the newlyweds, both aged 14, were led by Queen Eleanor and her ladies to a sumptuous nuptial chamber where they allegedly consummated their union in the presence of Francis who declared that 'each had shown valour in the joust'. Next morning, Pope Clement found them still in bed and noted their satisfied expressions.

Catherine de' Medici spent the first 14 years of her married life at the court of her father-in-law, Francis I. He was 39 years old in 1533 and had been on the throne 18 years. Tall and well-built, he was above all a man of action. Forever on the move within his own kingdom, he was a passionate huntsman, a notable patron of the arts and the builder of many fine châteaux. Catherine soon gained his affection, for she shared his taste for the great outdoors and was, it seems, an outstanding rider. Catherine soon joined the 'fair band of ladies' who accompanied the king on his hunts.³

Henri, duc d'Orléans, was a sturdy lad, tall for his age. He became a keen sportsman excelling at the *jeu de paume*, the ancestor of modern tennis. Riding and hunting were among his favourite activities, yet he lacked his father's *joie de vivre*. Contemporaries described him as secretive by nature and melancholic. Deprived of motherly affection during a period of captivity in Spain, Henri attached himself to Diane de Poitiers, one of his grandmother's ladies-in-waiting. A widow, 20 years his senior, Diane was renowned for her physical charms which she evidently exploited with consummate skill.⁴

Fraught from the start, Catherine's marriage had come about for political reasons. By forming an alliance with the pope, Francis hoped to consolidate and enhance his interests in Italy, but Clement VII died in September 1534, less than a year after his visit to Marseilles. The subsequent election of a member of the Farnese family as pope effectively destroyed the *raison d'être* of Catherine's marriage. Her status was instantly reduced to that of a foreigner of relatively modest origin. Francis allegedly complained that he had been given the girl 'stark naked'. Her position became even more difficult following the sudden death of Francis I's eldest son, the Dauphin François, on 10 August 1536. Henri, Catherine's husband, now became the king's heir presumptive. As yet, she had not produced a child and the future of the dynasty hung in the balance. Her

³ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), p. 49.

⁴ Lucien Romier, *Les origines politiques des guerres de religion* (Paris, 1913), Vol. 1, pp. 20–29; Ivan Cloulas, *Henri II* (Paris, 1985), F.C. Baumgartner, *Henry II* (Durham, NC, 1988), pp. 23–5, 39–40, 64–5, 103.

predicament became worse still when her husband had an illegitimate daughter thereby proving his virility. Happily for Catherine, on 20 January 1544 she at last gave birth to a boy. Her relations with her husband were, of course, bedevilled by his love for Diane de Poitiers who became his mistress about 1538. It has been suggested that their love was only platonic, but there is much evidence to the contrary.⁵

Birth and Childhood

The accession of Henry II, following the death of Francis I on 31 March 1547, was followed by a Palace Revolution. He cashiered his father's 'fair band', some of whom sought shelter in the household of Francis I's widow, Queen Eleonor. She soon returned to Spain where she died in 1558. Two principal beneficiaries of the Palace Revolution were Anne de Montmorency, who had fallen from power in 1541, and the king's mistress, Diane de Poitiers. The former resumed his functions as the king's chief minister, while Diane was showered with gifts of money and property, including the pretty château of Chenonceau. In October 1548 she was made duchess of Valentinois, the highest honour any female commoner could receive. It was in this capacity that she walked among the princesses of the blood at Catherine's coronation at the abbey of Saint-Denis on 10 June 1549.⁶ As queen, Catherine was not called upon to be active politically. She served twice as regent during her husband's absence on military campaigns, but with powers narrowly circumscribed. This was just as well as she was almost continually pregnant. Having already produced two children – François and Elizabeth – during Francis I's reign, she produced eight more during the 12 years of Henry II's reign: Claude, born at Fontainebleau on 12 November 1547; Louis, duc d'Orléans, on 3 February 1549, Charles-Maximilien – the future Charles IX, on 27 June 1550, Alexandre-Edouard, the future Henry III – at Fontainebleau on 19 September 1551; Marguerite – the future 'Reine Margot' – at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 14 May 1553; Hercule – the future François, duc d'Anjou – at Fontainebleau on 18 March 1555, and, lastly, female twins, Jeanne and Victoire – on 24 June 1556. According to Simon Renard, the Spanish ambassador, their birth nearly killed Catherine. Victoire lay

⁵ Robert Jean Knecht, *Catherine de Medici* (London, 1998), pp. 28–31.

⁶ Cloulas, *Henri II*, pp. 228–31.

dead in her womb for six hours and her leg had to be broken to save her mother's life. Jeanne died seven weeks later.⁷

The future Henry III was the sixth child and fourth son of Henry II and Catherine de' Medici. His birth at the château of Fontainebleau on the night of the 18 to the 19 of September 1551 was announced by Anne de Montmorency in a letter to provincial governors: 'I must not forget to inform you,' he wrote, 'that last night the queen was delivered of a fine boy. Both mother and son are well, thank God!' The new prince was christened Alexandre-Edouard. Alexandre was a name much favoured by the House of Bourbon to which his godfather, Antoine de Bourbon (father of the future Henry IV), belonged. The name, Edouard, was given in honour of Edward VI, the young king of England who was another godfather. The prince's godmother was Maria Paleologo, the wife of Federico II Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, who, as a boy, had been sent to the court of Francis I. Alexandre-Edouard, who was given the title of duc d' Angoulême, did not remain for long at Fontainebleau. He soon joined his brothers and sisters at Blois. For the sake of simplicity we shall call him Alexandre until his confirmation in 1566 when he acquired the new name of Henri.

Royal children in sixteenth-century France were kept away from the court. The recent discovery of correspondence in the Gonzaga archives in Mantua sheds much light on the lives of Henry II's children.⁸ Whenever the court stayed at the château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, they were sent elsewhere. An account book of 1549–51 refers to the Dauphin being at the château of Carrières. We know from an Italian letter, dated 24 February 1551, that during the court's residence at Blois, the royal children were some 15 kilometres away at the château of Villelout. This was for two reasons: to reduce the risk of catching plague or some other disease, and to shelter them from the chaotic, violent and often dissolute life of the court. An axiom of sixteenth-century medical science was the necessity of breathing 'wholesome air' (*bon air*), which may explain why three of the residences chosen to house the royal children – Saint-Germain, Blois and Amboise – were situated on wind-swept promontories overlooking rivers. It would also have been unsettling for royal children to be constantly on the move, as the court usually was. Their education called for a more sedentary existence.

Just as individual members of the royal family had their own households, so did the children of Henri and Catherine. It was run by Jean d'Humières and his

⁷ Jean Héritier, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1940), pp. 83–4.

⁸ Monique Chatenet, 'Les enfants de Henri II et de Catherine de Médicis au château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Le témoignage des diplomates de Mantoue' in *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Saint-Germain*, 45 (2008), pp. 19–33.

wife, Françoise de Contay, who were respectively the *gouverneur* and *gouvernante* of the 'children of France'. Following Jean d'Humières' death in 1550, his place was taken by Claude d'Urfé, while Françoise Contay retained her position. In 1550–51 the household comprised some 250 people to whom must be added the household of Mary Stuart, comprising 30 officials and ladies, which had arrived in France in August 1548. Some rooms at Saint-Germain had to be partitioned to accommodate them. In addition to household staff, the young princes had a number of socially mixed companions: some were the sons of domestic servants while others were members of the highest families in the land.

The close attention paid by Catherine to her children's upbringing is reflected in her letters.⁹ 'They are ill,' she once wrote 'from being too fat rather than too thin.' When plague hit Blois, the children were moved to Amboise. Catherine asked for their portraits. 'Do not fail,' she wrote to d'Humières, 'to order your artist to paint from life all my children, both boys and girls exactly as they are, without omitting any facial detail. Drawings will suffice as they can be done faster, and send them to me as soon as you can...' One such drawing is of Alexandre. A large bonnet covers part of his high forehead. Catherine also asked for her children's horoscopes to be drawn up. Michel de Notre Dame, better known as Nostradamus, was summoned to Blois in 1553.¹⁰ He prophesied that Henry II's four sons would all be crowned in turn. Events were to prove him wrong: François, duc d'Alençon, never became king.

As her children grew up, Catherine wished to be closer to them. In 1553, the 'little court' was divided: while the Dauphin François, now 10 years' old, settled at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, his brothers and sisters remained at Amboise. Among their playmates, called *enfants d'honneur*, were three of the Constable's sons, also Jean de Luxembourg, Gilbert de Lérès, the young Coligny, Théligny, Philippe Strozzi and Guy du Lude. A letter written by the cardinal of Lorraine on 27 February 1553 to Mary Stuart gives the name of Alexandre's tutor as the sieur de Montpipeau. He was soon eclipsed by Jacques Amyot, who had been recommended to Henry II by cardinal François de Tournon. The son of a butcher of Melun, Amyot had entered the church and become abbot *in commendam* of Bellozane, a Premonstratensian house in the diocese of Rouen. Having mastered Greek, he translated the *Romance of Theagenes and Choricléia* by Heliodorus.

⁹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. H. de La Ferrière and G. Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1909), Vol. I, pp. 17–18, 20–22, 26, 28, 31–2.

¹⁰ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III* (Paris, 1985), p. 23.

Among other Greek texts which he translated into French were *Daphnis and Chloë* by Longus and the *Parallel Lives* of Plutarch.¹¹

Alexandre's earliest surviving letter dates from 1557. It was written to his brother, François, who was unwell at the time: 'Monsieur,' wrote Alexandre, 'I am very sad that you should be ill and for so long. I would like to have something that pleases you and to be with you so as to help you pass the time. Monsieur, I am still studying hard so that I may serve you once I grow up. I pray God that you may soon be cured. Your very humble and obedient brother, Alexandre de France...'¹² On 24 April 1558 all the royal children were in Paris for the wedding of the Dauphin François with Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. He was 15 and she one year older. Such was Catherine's delight at seeing her children that she decided to keep them in Paris, but not at the Louvre. She bought for them a *hôtel* in the rue des Poulies and they were given a new *gouverneur* in the person of Louis Prévost de Sansac who was assisted by Jacques de Labrosse.¹³

In April 1559 France and Spain made peace at Cateau-Cambrésis. The treaty caused much rejoicing in France as it seemed to mark the end of the rivalry between the two royal houses that had caused so much war and suffering. It also enabled Henry II to attend to the problem of heresy. Ever since the reign of Francis I, the kingdom's religious unity had been challenged by people disenchanted with the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic church. The king could not stand aside. He was bound by his coronation oath to extirpate heresy from his kingdom. The peace was sealed by a marriage between Henry's daughter, Elizabeth of Valois, and Philip II of Spain who had lost his first wife, Mary Tudor. He was 32 and his bride only 14. On 18 June the peace was sworn in Notre-Dame and four days later the marriage was celebrated. Among those who attended was young Alexandre. Three days later the duke of Savoy and Henry II's sister, Marguerite were married, also in Paris. To honour the two marriages the king ordered a magnificent tournament scheduled to last five days. It took place in the rue Saint-Antoine in front of the old royal palace of the Tournelles. On the third day of the tournament, Henry II appeared in the lists riding a Turkish stallion and wearing a black and white outfit in honour of Diane de Poitiers, 'the lady whom he served'. He ran two courses, vanquishing his opponents, but in the third he was seriously jolted by Gabriel de Montgomery, captain of the Scottish guard. Refusing to accept this humiliation, the king challenged his rival to another contest against the advice of his queen and others. Falling on each

¹¹ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 24; A. Ciaronescu, *Vie de Jacques Amyot* (Paris, 1941).

¹² *Lettres de Henri III, roi de France*, ed. Michel François, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1950), p. 3.

¹³ Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 24–5.

other furiously, the combatants splintered each other's lance. As Montgomery's glanced upwards, it struck the king's visor, lifting it up. Several needle-sharp splinters of wood penetrated his forehead just above the right eye. Some noblemen caught Henry as he was about to fall from his mount and carried him, bleeding profusely, to the palace of the Tournelles where he lay for several days. Vesalius, the famous physician, who had come in haste from Brussels, declared that the king would survive, but he died on 10 July. Alexandre attended his funeral on 13 August at the abbey of Saint-Denis outside Paris along with his brothers and sister, Marguerite.¹⁴

Henry II's untimely death plunged France into a major political crisis. François, his eldest son, who now became Francis II, was only 15. He was old enough in theory to rule, but lacked maturity and experience. The government consequently fell into the hands of his mother, Catherine de' Medici, who had served as regent during her late husband's military campaigns. Breaking from tradition, she chose to mourn wearing black, not white, and continued to do so for the rest of her life except for her sons' marriages. A broken lance with a ribbon bearing the motto *Hinc dolor, hinc lacrymae* (Hence my suffering and my tears) became the symbol of her grief, as did a mountain of hot lime with the motto *Ardorem extincto testatur vivere flamma*. Grief, however, did not distract Catherine from the maternal duties which were henceforth to dictate her life. Henry II had relied for advice mainly on Diane, and on his principal minister, the Constable Anne de Montmorency. As Catherine hated both, she turned instead to François, duc de Guise and his brother, Charles, cardinal of Lorraine, the uncles of Francis II's queen, Mary Stuart.

Now 40 years old, Catherine was tall and plump. She was no beauty: her face was round with a large nose, bulging eyes, thick lips and a broad chin. Her olive complexion betrayed her semi-Italian origin. She was fond of horse-riding, dancing and the theatre, especially comedies. Although Protestant propagandists would have us believe that she was depraved, her private life seems to have been above reproach; even rather austere. One of her first acts after her husband's death was to expel Diane de Poitiers from court, describing her as 'a whore'. A tireless worker, Catherine would spend hours at her desk dictating letters to her secretaries. Often she would take up a pen herself. Her spiky handwriting is not easy to read, particularly as her spelling is phonetic.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cloulas, *Henri II*, pp. 588–94; Lucien Romier, *Les origines politiques des guerres de religion* (Paris, 1913), Vol. 2, pp. 378–90.

¹⁵ Jean-H Mariéjol, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1920); Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*; Knecht, *Catherine de' Medici*.

On 18 September 1559 the Dauphin François was crowned at Rheims. The court then travelled south and, after spending some time at the 'bois de Vincennes', moved on to the Loire valley where it soon had to face a serious plot, known as the Tumult of Amboise. The Protestants or Huguenots had hoped that the first prince of the blood, Antoine de Bourbon, king of Navarre, would become regent, but he seemed more interested in reclaiming Spanish Navarre than in challenging the power of the Guises. So a group of Calvinists, possibly led by Navarre's younger brother Condé, plotted to overthrow them. The chief plotter was a petty nobleman from Périgord, called Jean du Barry, seigneur de La Renaudie. He had spent five months recruiting supporters in France and Switzerland. In February 1560 they held a meeting in Nantes purporting to be the Estates-General. Its purpose was to legitimize their forthcoming coup. Its stated purpose was to overthrow the Guises who controlled the government. The plot was due to take effect on 16 March, but reports of a plot soon reached the ears of the Guises. As the conspirators gathered in woods around Amboise, they were set upon by royal troops. Some, including La Renaudie, were killed in ambushes; others were rounded up, tortured and executed. Many were drowned in the Loire or hanged from the iron balconies of the château.¹⁶ Alexandre, now nine years' old, may have witnessed the grizzly spectacle. If so, it initiated him into a climate of violence that was to dominate his entire life. Meanwhile, he pressed on with his studies. As Amyot remembered in a letter written in 1577, Alexandre had as sharp a mind as his grandfather, Francis I, but far more application. Alongside his studies, he also learned to dance and became a good swordsman.

The aftermath of the Tumult of Amboise was surprising. Instead of seeking to wipe out the Huguenots, the government sought to heal the religious division of France. It favoured the calling of a meeting of churchmen which might appeal to Protestants of goodwill and restore unity. Meanwhile, as the French court tried to forget its recent troubles, fires of discontent smouldered across the kingdom. From all parts came news of Huguenot congregations being set up. Public demonstrations against the rule of the Guises took place in Paris and elsewhere. A flood of pamphlets denounced them and the queen-mother. In June 1560 a new Chancellor of France was appointed in the person of Michel de L'Hôpital. He did not think that two religions could co-exist within the kingdom, but he also knew that Protestantism was too powerful to be eradicated peacefully. In his estimation, the best solution to France's domestic problems lay in reform of the church and of the judicial system, but order needed to be restored first. This meant giving a share of government to the great nobles, including the Bourbons,

¹⁶ Lucien Romier, *La Conjuration d'Amboise* (Paris, 1923).

and convincing the people that reforms were underway.¹⁷ With these ends in view an Assembly of Notables was summoned to Fontainebleau in August. It comprised the king's councillors, princes of the blood, great officers of the crown and knights of the Order of St. Michael. L'Hôpital opened the assembly with a speech in which he compared the state to a sick man in need of a cure. Francis II formally summoned a meeting of the Estates-General for 10 December. The Huguenots, meanwhile, continued to press the claims of the Bourbon princes of the blood against the Guises. They also resorted to arms in Lyons and elsewhere. When Condé began raising troops, Francis II ordered Antoine de Bourbon to bring him to court so that he might explain his action. Bourbon duly complied. On 31 October Condé was arrested and thrown into prison. Tried in November, he was found guilty of treason, but two of his judges failed to sign the sentence. This gained time just as the king fell gravely ill. Meanwhile, delegates to the Estates-General were arriving in Orléans. Catherine, fearing that if the king died, the estates would hand over power to the princes of the blood, accused Bourbon of plotting against the government. Protesting his innocence, he offered to cede to her his right to the regency. Catherine promptly accepted his offer and, in return, promised to appoint him lieutenant-general of the kingdom. On 5 December Francis II died. Thinking of her late husband, Catherine wrote to her daughter, the queen of Spain: 'I loved him so dearly that I was always fearful, as you know. God has taken him from me and not content with that he has taken your brother whom I loved, leaving me with three young children and a kingdom utterly divided wherein there is no one I can wholly trust who does not harbour some private passion...'

Catholics and Huguenots

Francis II's 10-year-old brother now took the throne as Charles IX and Alexandre became his heir presumptive. He was admitted to the Order of St. Michael and, on 8 October 1560, assumed the title of duc d'Orléans, previously held by the new king. He was now important enough to be noticed by foreign diplomats. The Venetian envoy, Giovanni Michiele, described him as follows: 'Orléans, who is now called Edouard, is nine years' old, one year less than the king. He

¹⁷ Robert Descimon (ed.), *L'Hospital: Discours pour la majorité de Charles IX* (Paris, 1993), pp. 7–36; J.H.M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis* (London, 1975), pp. 151–62; Seong-Hak Kim, *Michel de L'Hôpital: The Vision of a Reformist Chancellor during the French Religious Wars* (Kirkville, Missouri, 1997), p. 57.

is an attractive child, more serious and much more robust than the king. His complexion is fresh and rosy. But, to tell the truth, the young prince has the great misfortune of having a fistula between his right eye and nose for which no remedy has yet been found.¹⁸ As Charles IX was too young to rule, a regent had to be appointed. By custom this should have been Antoine de Bourbon, king of Navarre, but he had forfeited his right by his recent conduct. On 21 December the *conseil privé* appointed Catherine de' Medici as regent with sweeping powers. Now 41 years old, she was determined to uphold the crown's independence by striking a fine balance between the rival houses of Bourbon and Guise, favouring each in turn. As the Guises had recently dominated the government, she now turned to the Bourbons. Navarre was appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom as Catherine had promised, but he was given only minor responsibilities. In February 1561 the court settled at Fontainebleau before undertaking the voyage to Rheims for Charles IX's coronation or *sacre*. During the ceremony, on 5 May, Alexandre stood next to the king and was given the task of placing the crown on his head. Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford, Queen Elizabeth's representative at the ceremony, described him as better looking than the king.¹⁹

As heir to the throne, Alexandre was entitled to be called 'Monsieur'. He again appeared in public on 9 September 1561 at the opening session of the Colloquy of Poissy, a religious debate between Catholic and Protestant churchmen organized by Catherine de' Medici. The principal Protestant spokesman was Théodore De Bèze, Calvin's chief lieutenant, who had come from Geneva by royal invitation. The government hoped that the conference would produce a doctrinal compromise satisfactory to both Catholics and Protestants, but the gulf separating them proved unbridgeable. The liveliness, not to say acrimony, of the debates at Poissy and the presence of so many Calvinist pastors near and even in the court seems to have unsettled the royal family. One day, as Catherine was talking to the papal legate, the young king and some friends entered her chamber dressed as cardinals, bishops, abbots and monks! On another occasion, Charles IX was seen wearing a mitre and holding a crozier! The legate was shocked, but Catherine dismissed these antics as 'childish pranks'. As for Alexandre, he was seen pulling faces and making rude gestures before statues of St. Peter and St. Paul. In January 1562 he allegedly said to the wife of the Spanish ambassador: 'I am the little Huguenot, but one day I shall be the big one.' In 1571 the ambassador, Don Francès de Alava, reported that Alexandre had been a Huguenot for five years before his sister, Marguerite, had persuaded

¹⁸ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 35.

¹⁹ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 36.

him to return to the Catholic faith. Charles IX allegedly said that he attended mass only to please his mother. Catherine certainly seemed keen to uphold tradition, but De Bèze thought she did so only 'for show'.²⁰ What is certain is that in later life Henry II's sons remained staunchly Catholic.

Marguerite de Navarre recalls in her memoirs that the court was infested with heresy during the Colloquy of Poissy. She was only eight years old in 1561, too young, one would have thought, to have any serious religious commitment. Marguerite singles out the strange behaviour of her brother, Alexandre. Under pressure from the 'damned Huguenot church' (*malheureuse huguenotterie*), he had pressed her repeatedly to change faith. He had thrown her prayer books into the fire and forced her to turn to the 'psalms and huguenot prayers'. Marguerite had handed them over to her governess, Madame de Curton, who had taken her several times to see cardinal de Tournon. He had urged her to remain a good Catholic at whatever cost and had replaced the prayer books and rosaries destroyed by her brother. Still according to Marguerite, she had endured the taunts of Alexandre's friends, who pointed out that all sensible people, on learning the truth, had given up bigotry. Alexandre, she alleges, had told her that she would be whipped by her mother. On hearing this, Catherine had reprimanded him and his *gouverneurs*, while urging them to return to 'the true, holy and ancient faith of our fathers from which she herself had never strayed'. Marguerite told Alexandre that she would rather be whipped or even killed than face eternal damnation. Can any of this be believed? Marguerite did not write her memoirs till after 1585. They were not published till 1628. By 1585 Marguerite had fallen out with her brother. We also know that she could tell untruths.²¹

While the court was at Saint-Germain, the Guises, fearing a *coup d'état* by the Huguenots, are said to have advised Catherine to send away her children. Anne d'Este, the wife of François de Guise suggested that Alexandre might be sent to his sister, Claude, duchess of Lorraine, and Hercule-François to his aunt, Marguerite, duchess of Savoy. About the same time, Catherine got wind of a plot by Jacques de Savoie, duc de Nemours, a close ally of the Guises, to arrange for Alexandre to escape one night from his apartment at Saint-Germain. She also learnt of a similar plan mooted by Alexandre's friend, Henri de Joinville, eldest son of the duc de Guise. Alexandre, it seems, was tempted, but once he knew that his mother was aware of the plot, he had to confess. On 17 October Chantonnay, the Spanish ambassador, urged Catherine to send away her children. Her

²⁰ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 37.

²¹ *Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois La Reine Margot*, ed. Yves Cazaux (Paris, 1971), pp. 38–9; Éliane Viennot, *Marguerite de Valois* (Paris, 1995), p. 26.

response was to tighten their security. Some windows in Alexandre's apartment that overlooked the park were apparently walled up. The Guises, hearing of the plot, denied any responsibility and accused the Huguenots of slander. On 29 October Alexandre was brought before Charles IX and his council. He admitted that Nemours had tried to lure him away from court, but did not implicate the Guises. On 30 October Catherine asked him in the presence of the Spanish ambassador why he had thought of leaving her. He replied: 'Forgive me, Madam. I never thought of doing so.' The queen-mother ordered the arrest of Nemours, who had fled from the court. Meanwhile, Philippe de Lignerolles, who had acted as his mouthpiece, was arrested and put on trial. It soon became clear, however, that the charges against him and Nemours rested only on the testimony of a 10-year-old child. Catherine wisely decided to drop the case. On 9 June Nemours was allowed to return to court.²²

The religious conscience of a child of 10 is not easily probed. Chantonnay suspected Alexandre's tutor, Carnavalet, of undermining his pupil's Catholic faith, but if he was right (and of this we cannot be sure, for he was inclined to see a Huguenot under every bed) Carnavalet's influence would have been countered by that of another tutor, Jean-Paul de Selve, a staunch Catholic who became bishop of Saint-Flour in 1567. Writing to his mother two years later, Alexandre said: 'As you know, Madam, it pleased you to give me the said Saint-Flour as tutor in my youth and I would be setting a bad example to my fellows if the memory of his services were to be buried with his body.'²³ The Edict of January 1562, which banned Huguenot worship inside towns while allowing it outside, did nothing to reassure the Spanish ambassador who continued to send alarmist dispatches to his government in 1562 and 1563. He complained to Catherine de' Medici of people speaking too freely about religion within her children's hearing. She dismissed his evidence as lies, adding that her children were being raised in a manner that would in time earn her the gratitude of the kingdom and of all 'right-minded' people. In the spring of 1563 Alexandre fell seriously ill. A running sore near his left eye caused his doctors to create an artificial abscess in his right arm. This was 'to remain always open so that the humours that had accumulated in his head should not come out on the other side!' The abscess was painful whenever the prince lifted his arm to write. But in his dispatches to Philip II, the ambassador was more concerned about Alexandre's spiritual health. On 3 February 1563 he wrote that the prince could be considered lost to the Roman faith. 'I do not know why the queen-mother does nothing about

²² Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 39–44.

²³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. ed. Michel François, Vol. III, p. 111.

this,' he wrote, 'the duc d' Orléans is still young ... It is certain that he does not treat the host as a holy sacrament, calling it John the White (*Juan el Blanco*).'²⁴ By discrediting Alexandre, the ambassador may have been hoping to open the way for more Spanish involvement in French affairs.²⁴ Alexandre was Catherine de'Medici's favourite child. She called him 'my eyes'. More lively than Charles IX, he was also mischievous, liking to tease. Though not particularly keen on Latin, he expressed himself well in French and enjoyed reading.

Following the Edict of January, the Guises retired to their estates and flatly refused to return to court. They met the duke of Württemberg and some Lutheran theologians at Saverne. The cardinal of Lorraine seemed inclined to reach some sort of doctrinal agreement with them and the Guises pledged themselves not to persecute Protestants. Ten days later, however, as François duc de Guise, was returning to Paris with an escort, he came across Huguenots worshipping in a barn at Wassy. The sequel is not crystal clear, but a massacre of worshippers by Guise's men left about 30 dead and more than a hundred wounded.²⁵ When the news reached Paris, the Catholic population rejoiced. The Prince of Condé and other Huguenot nobles sent a deputation to the queen-mother at Monceaux to demand that Guise be brought to justice. He was duly summoned, but chose to march on Paris with Montmorency and Saint-André. They became known as the Triumvirs. As Guise entered the capital at the head of two or three thousand troops, he was hailed by the people as the 'hero of Wassy'. Catherine for her part moved to Fontainebleau and began wooing Condé. She wrote to him four times in March, seeking his protection for herself and her children. But, instead of responding, Condé went to Meaux, leaving the way clear for the Triumvirs to act. On 27 March they came to Fontainebleau with a large force of cavalry. They effectively kidnapped the queen-mother and her children and brought them back to Paris. Putting on a brave face, Catherine blamed the Huguenots for her plight. Ridiculing the suggestion that she and her family were prisoners, she assumed leadership of the Catholic party under the tutelage of the Triumvirs.²⁶

The Huguenots, meanwhile, challenged the government. On 2 April they seized the town of Orléans and, six days later, Condé issued a manifesto claiming that he had taken up arms to liberate the king and his mother and to ensure that the Edict of January was applied. Thus began the first of the French Wars

²⁴ Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 51–2.

²⁵ Stuart Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers: the Guise family and the Making of Europe* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 12–19.

²⁶ Mariéjol, *Catherine de Médicis*, pp. 118–19; *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 1, pp. 281–4; Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, p. 171.

of Religion.²⁷ On 13 July the parlement issued a decree allowing anyone to slaughter Huguenots with impunity. According to the *Histoire ecclésiastique*, Catholic peasants and artisans turned into tigers and lions, while women also took up arms. Huguenots, too, went on the rampage, destroying religious images and stripping altars of their ornaments. Not even tombs were spared. As violence spread, Catherine appealed for help to the pope, the duke of Savoy and Philip II of Spain. The Huguenots, for their part, looked to Elizabeth I of England. On 20 September, at Hampton Court, Condé accepted her terms. The Huguenots also raised troops in Germany. The tide of war soon turned in favour of the Catholics, at least in the Loire valley where they recaptured Blois. On hearing of the Huguenot talks with England, the Triumvirs attacked Rouen before English help could reach the city. Antoine de Navarre was fatally wounded during the siege. On 19 December the rival armies met near Dreux. A battle ensued in which the Huguenots were defeated, sustaining heavy losses. Condé was taken prisoner, leaving Coligny in charge of the rump of the Huguenot army. On the Catholic side, Montmorency was taken prisoner and Saint-André was murdered after he had been taken prisoner. This left François, duc de Guise, as the only effective Triumvir. Assuming command of the king's army, he laid siege to Orleans, but on 18 February 1563 he was murdered by Poltrot de Méré, a Huguenot nobleman. This event destroyed the Guises as a political force, at least for the time being, as the duke's eldest son, Henri, prince de Joinville, was only 13 years old.²⁸ The way was left clear for Catherine de' Medici to take charge of the government. She arranged for Condé and Montmorency to negotiate a peace treaty. Signed at Amboise on 19 March 1563, it guaranteed freedom of conscience but regulated rights of worship according to social status. With the return of peace it became necessary to expel the English from Le Havre which Elizabeth I would only hand back in return for Calais. Condé and Montmorency joined forces to achieve this. On 29 July Alexandre, duc d'Orléans, who was now 11 years old, arrived at the French camp. Le Havre surrendered next day.

The Peace of Amboise enabled Catherine to impose her authority. The king of Navarre and the duc de Guise were dead and the heads of their respective houses were too young to be troublesome. Anne de Montmorency was getting old. Condé was tired of fighting and anxious to attend the court. Charles IX was only 13, but Catherine was anxious to have him proclaimed of age. This

²⁷ Olivia Carpi, *Les guerres de religion (1559–1598) Un conflit franco-français* (Paris, 2012), pp. 151–65.

²⁸ N.M. Sutherland, *Princes, Politics and Religion, 1547–1589* (London, 1984), pp. 73–96; Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers*, pp. 167–70.

had been fixed at 14 by a medieval ordinance. The council decided that Charles, being in his fourteenth year, was old enough to rule. On 12 April Catherine and her sons entered Rouen in triumph. Charles IX and Alexandre rode horses caparisoned in gold. Five days later Charles's majority was proclaimed in the Parlement of Rouen. At the same time the Edict of Amboise was formally confirmed. Charles IX ordered his subjects to keep the peace and forbade them to seek foreign assistance. The chancellor explained that the new king expected to be obeyed universally while reserving his mother's right to command. After the First President's reply, the ceremony of homage took place. Catherine formally handed over the government to her son. As she was about to make her obeisance, he left his throne and, cap in hand, assured her that she would continue to rule 'as much or more than ever'. Each of the dignitaries present, including Alexandre, came to the king, bowed deeply and kissed his hand. The doors of the parlement were thrown open and a proclamation was read out, calling on all the king's subjects to lay down their arms.²⁹

The royal family left Rouen on 19 August, then toured Normandy and part of the Ile-de-France before returning to Paris on 8 October. Catherine remembered the advice given by her father-in-law, Francis I: 'to live at peace with the French and to make them love their king' they needed to be entertained. This appealed to her love of display and magnificence. She became the leading impresario of her time. On 24 January 1564 the court left Paris and, after stopping at Saint-Maur, went on to Fontainebleau where it remained for 43 days. By means of feasts and entertainments Catherine hoped to persuade the Catholic and Huguenot nobles to forget their differences. On 12 February a tournament took place outside Alexandre's lodging. The combatants consisted of two teams, each comprising six knights, captained respectively by Albert de Gondi and the Rhingrave. On Shrove Tuesday an entertainment was staged in an enclosed field with grandstands on each side, one for each sex. Within the enclosure stood an enchanted castle, guarded by giants, a dwarf and devils. Inside, a group of captive ladies waited anxiously to be set free. A hermit in his cell guarded the field. Six teams of knights, led by high-ranking nobles, came forward. They were followed by six nymphs on horseback. They all took up a position outside the 'theatre' where Charles IX was seated. As the hermit rang a handbell, the knights, led by Condé, attacked the castle and successfully rescued the ladies. On another day, 12 Greeks and 12 Trojans fought over the beauty of a certain lady. In addition to such contests in which medieval chivalry and antiquity were combined, bucolic scenes were staged. The poet, Pierre de Ronsard, was

²⁹ Mariéjol, *Catherine de Médicis*, p. 128.

commissioned by the queen-mother to write the libretto of a pastoral or *bergerie* in which the 'royal children' participated under fancy names. Thus Charles IX was called 'Carlin' and his brother, Alexandre, 'Orléantin'. The latter had to recite a lengthy poem by Ronsard to which his sister, Marguerite, replied, also in verse. After this family entertainment, a play, called *La Belle Genièvre*, was performed in the ballroom.³⁰ By means of such festivals and entertainments Catherine assisted by her so-called 'flying squadron' of ladies-in-waiting sought to tame the nobility. This was when the future Henry III had his first taste of the splendours of court life.

³⁰ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 59.

Chapter 2

Years of Apprenticeship

In an age without media a king needed to show himself to his subjects in order to impose his authority; they needed to know each other. With this end in mind and also to see for herself the situation in the provinces, Catherine de' Medici decided to take Charles IX and his court on an extended progress through the kingdom.¹ She hoped that the sight of the young king would serve to bring together discordant elements in the nation, and was also keen to meet her son-in-law, Philip II of Spain.

The Grand Tour of France (1564–1566)

The progress began on 24 January 1564 when some 2,000 people, accompanied by a multitude of beasts of burden and a veritable army, set off from Paris.² In addition to Charles IX, the queen-mother and their respective households, the royal party included Alexandre, duc d'Orléans, with his own household. This travelled either with the main party or forestalled it by a day or two. Princess Marguerite, who was 11 years old, accompanied her mother while young François-Hercule, duc d'Anjou, stayed behind at the château of Vincennes. Among important officials on the tour were the Chancellor, Michel de L'Hôpital, and the Constable Anne de Montmorency. The cardinals de Bourbon and de Guise were also present, as were many nobles, including the Prince de Condé, Henri de Navarre and the young duc de Guise. In the course of the progress nobles or officials with regional responsibilities would join the court for limited periods. Foreign ambassadors, who accompanied the court, sent reports back to their respective governments describing various happenings on the tour. In the course of the journey, which lasted 27 months, the king held a *lit-de-justice* at

¹ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), pp. 183–88; Mariéjol, Jean-H., *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1920), pp. 149–50.

² Iean Boutier, Alain Dewerpe and Daniel Nordman, *Un tour de France royal: Le voyage de Charles IX (1564–1566)* (Paris, 1984), p. 7.

the Parlement of Dijon (May 1564), the Parlement of Toulouse (February 1565) and the Parlement of Bordeaux (April 1565).³

Although the court's itinerary had probably been mapped out in advance, some of its stops seem to have been chosen on the spur of the moment. The king's state of health, bad weather, the state of the roads and feast days could all affect the speed of travel. A constant stream of messengers went ahead of the main party to inform local officials of the court's movements. How people travelled was determined by status. Charles IX and his mother travelled by coach or litter; or they rode horses, as did most of the nobles. Boats were used where rivers were navigable. As for the rank and file, it travelled on foot. The court's speed of travel was leisurely by modern standards, the van often reaching its destination before the rearguard had left the last halt. The court did not necessarily travel as a single body or follow the same route: its members would part company, take short cuts, travel across fields and meet up along the way. Halts varied in duration: some lasted one night only; others a week or more. In overall command of the progress was the Constable, Anne de Montmorency. He kept discipline, issued instructions to town governors and rode ahead of the main party to see that everything was ready for the king's reception.⁴

In the course of the progress Alexandre was given numerous opportunities of observing the place occupied in French hearts by the monarchy. This was best expressed in the imagery that accompanied the king's entry into various towns.⁵ Classical mythology, the Bible and French history were regularly drawn on to honour his presence and that of his mother. In the immediate aftermath of the First War of Religion, pacification and the consolidation of the monarchy were the order of the day. Because of his dependence on Catherine's counsel, Charles IX was compared to Saint Louis who had been guided in his early years by his mother, Blanche de Castille. He was also compared to Hercules and more particularly to the Gallic Hercules whose power stemmed from his use of the spoken word. Various identified with Solomon, Theseus, Alexander the Great, Perseus, Augustus or Trajan, Charles IX's name was linked to his eight predecessors, including Charlemagne, and the number nine used to evoke the nine Muses and the nine Worthies. A recurring theme of royal entries was Charles's motto '*Pietate et Iustitia*', accompanied by two columns, one of gold,

³ Seong-Hak Kim, *Michel de L'Hôpital: The Vision of a Reformist Chancellor during the French Religious Wars* (Kirkville, Missouri, 1997), pp. 132–33.

⁴ Boutier, Dewerpe and Nordman, *Un Tour de France royal*, pp. 119–29.

⁵ Robert Jean Knecht, *The French Renaissance Court* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 99–112.

the other of silver. Sometimes these were incorporated into a triumphal arch. The image of the Sun King, which in time was to characterize the iconography of Louis XIV, was already present at Charles IX's entry into Toulouse and La Rochelle. In many towns reference was made to distinctive local features. Thus, at Tours the entry was largely built around the manufacture of silk and arms. The most learned entry was in Toulouse where there were elaborate decorations, poems in French, and inscriptions in Latin and Greek by several classical scholars.⁶

After stopping at Sens, where a massacre of Huguenots had taken place as recently as 1562, the royal caravan reached Troyes where Charles IX was given a spectacular entry. Alexandre took part in the procession wearing a gown of cloth of gold. On 25 March the king touched 200 victims of scrofula in the cathedral. It was also at Troyes that a peace treaty was signed with England which restored Calais to France.⁷ Moving on to Bar-le-Duc, the court attended the baptism of Catherine's first grandchild, Charlotte-Catherine, the daughter of Claude de France and Charles III duke of Lorraine.⁸ During three days spent in mid-May at the Carthusian monastery of Champnol, the royal children were able to see the magnificent tombs of the dukes of Burgundy. On 22 May Charles IX made his entry into Dijon, whose governor, Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes, a veteran of many campaigns, staged a military pageant so lifelike that Catherine was petrified with fear. A principal aim of the progress was to ensure that the Edict of Amboise of 1563 was properly enforced. The independent leanings of the provincial parlements and municipal authorities had to be curbed. On 23 May, Alexandre, acting in the king's name, sent for the registers of the Parlement of Dijon and for information on the municipal authority from the lieutenant-general of the province. The crown intervened in the affairs of almost every town on its progress. Wherever possible Charles IX tried to strike a proper balance between Catholics and Huguenots. From Chalon, the court travelled by boat to Mâcon, where it was joined by Jeanne d'Albret, Antoine de Bourbon's widow, a zealous Protestant who was accompanied by eight Calvinist pastors. Lyons, the next major stop, was a city with a large Huguenot community. It was forbidden to hold services during the royal visit, a ban soon extended to other towns still to be visited by the court. Charles IX made his entry on 13 June. Alexandre this time wore a suit of crimson velvet embroidered with gold and silver thread. It was also studded with precious stones, as were his hat and breeches. The court's

⁶ Pierre Champion, *Catherine de Médicis présente à Charles IX son royaume* (Paris, 1937), pp. 214–16, 241–2.

⁷ Champion, *Catherine de Médicis présente à Charles IX son royaume*, pp. 76–7.

⁸ Champion, *Catherine de Médicis présente à Charles IX son royaume*, pp. 83–9.

sojourn in Lyons was accompanied by pageants and celebrations in which the city's Italian and German communities took a prominent part. It was also here that the court was joined by Emmanuel-Philibert, duke of Savoy, and his wife, Marguerite, Alexandre's aunt. But an outbreak of plague obliged the court to move on 8 July to Crémieu where an edict was published conferring on the king the choice of municipal magistrates in the principal towns. The next halt was the château of Roussillon where, on 4 August, Charles IX ruled on the application of the Edict of Amboise. Protestant worship outside the limits laid down in the edict was to be severely punished. Resuming its progress on 15 August, the court travelled down the Rhône to Avignon, which was papal territory. At Salon-de-Crau, on 16 August, Catherine called on the elderly Michel de Notre-Dame, better known as 'Nostradamus', who, in return for royal gifts, prophesied (wrongly) that Charles IX would live as long as the constable.

At Aix-en-Provence, which the royal caravan reached on 23 October, Charles IX suspended the parlement following its stubborn refusal to register the Edict of Amboise, replacing it by a royal commission. The next stage in the progress was less contentious. At Brignoles, the king was welcomed by girls dancing the volta and martingale. Travelling through Provence, he and his brother were able to admire the distinctive flora, including orange and palm trees, pepper and cotton plants. They were also shown Roman remains. On 3 November, at Toulon, Charles IX and his companions took part in a mock naval battle disguised as Turks. As they crossed the Camargue, they saw flamingoes for the first time. At Arles, the king visited Les Alyscamps, the famous avenue of Roman sarcophagi, and watched bullfights in the arena. After crossing the Rhône at Tarascon, the court visited the Pont du Gard. At Nîmes, a staunchly Protestant town, the king's entry was enlivened by ingenious mechanical devices. Christmas was celebrated in Montpellier. On 1 January 1565 the royal party left for Toulouse, but at Carcassonne it was held up for ten days by a heavy fall of snow.

It was during the 46 days spent in Toulouse that Alexandre-Edouard was confirmed and given the new Christian name of Henri by which he was to be known for the rest of his life. On 11 March the royal caravan resumed its progress. Travelling through Montauban and Agen, it came to Bordeaux, where Charles IX held a *lit de justice* in the parlement on 12 April.⁹ After 23 in Bordeaux, the court left on 3 May for Bayonne, where Catherine hoped to meet her daughter, Elisabeth, now queen of Spain. At Mont-de-Marsan the court waited two weeks for confirmation that Elisabeth was on her way. Catherine went to Bayonne

⁹ Seong-Hak Kim, *Michel de L'Hôpital*, p. 133.

on 31 May to oversee preparations for her daughter's reception and Charles IX followed on 3 June. Six days later, Alexandre, now called Henri, set off to meet his sister in Spain and escort her back to France.



Figure 2.1 Drawing of Henry III as a child by François Clouet.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Henri met Elizabeth at Hernani in Navarre on 9 June. It was here that he wrote to Charles IX: 'Monsieur, please forgive me for not writing to you by Tranteon and also for not asking you to look after my small dogs, for I was afraid that they would give you trouble. Monsieur I have arrived with the queen, our sister, and have made good cheer; she looks just like you. As I do not know what else to say, I will leave it to the messenger to tell you more.'¹⁰ Next day, Elisabeth and her brother set off for San Sebastian and Irun. They met Charles IX and Catherine in the middle of a pontoon bridge crossing the river Bidassoa. Five days later Elizabeth entered Bayonne riding a white horse given to her by Charles IX. Its

¹⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, p. 4–5.

rich harness was a gift from Philip II. From 15 June until 2 July Catherine put on a series of festivities and ceremonies designed to show to her Spanish guests that France had not been ruined by the recent civil war. She gave full vent to her taste for luxury and display.¹¹

Triumphal entries were public occasions whereas royal festivals, such as those held at Fontainebleau, Bar-le-Duc and Bayonne, were domestic entertainments for the benefit of the court. The king continued to be the centre of attraction, but the activities were mainly knightly combats, *mascarades* and plays and the participants mostly younger members of the court. Official poets, such as Ronsard, participated, often under the personal direction of Catherine. A *mascarade* at Bar-le-Duc featured a quarrel between the four elements and the four planets as to which one had established Charles IX's prestige. Jupiter settled the matter by pointing out that he alone could endow the king with his many virtues. At Fontainebleau, on the eve of the Grand Tour, a series of banquets, tournaments and other spectacles coincided with the festivities that usually preceded the coming of Lent. On 13 February Catherine organized an excursion to a dairy, called La Vacherie, in the forest, where the court played at being shepherds and shepherdesses. After dinner, a play modelled on Ariosto was performed in the château's ballroom. Next day, Henri sponsored a *festin* and combat at his lodging. The king arrived at his brother's residence about 9 a.m. A military fanfare greeted him as he advanced to a parterre between two canals. In the water floated three youngsters dressed as Sirens with long gilded tails. The first read a long poem in Charles's honour while accompanying himself on a lute. The poem paid tribute to Henry II under whom the Age of Gold had flourished. With his death had come discord which his son intended to settle. He was assured that with his brother's help the Age of Gold would return. The poem ended by praising Catherine who had nurtured Charles and Henri. Neptune then appeared in a chariot drawn by four seahorses. He recited verses acknowledging Charles IX's sway over the sea. As the king moved forward, a great rock opened revealing a nymph sitting on a seashell inside a fountain. She, too, sang a sonnet in his praise. Musicians concealed in another rock serenaded Charles. Then, as he mounted a staircase leading to a banqueting hall, he was showered with flowers from a window above. After dinner the three goddesses – Juno, Pallas and Venus – offered him gifts: a golden globe, a trophy representing the arts of

¹¹ Boutier, Dewerpe and Nordman, *Un Tour de France*, pp. 87–104; Champion, *Catherine de Médicis présente à Charles IX son royaume, 1564–1566*, pp. 262–3; Victor E. Graham and W. McAllister Johnson, *The Royal Tour of France by Charles IX and Catherine de Medici* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 29–57.

war and peace, and a Cupid. Two dwarfs then appeared with a letter explaining why a joust was to follow. Six Greek heroes and six Trojan ones needed to settle a quarrel over the respective merits of their ladies. Once the king had given permission for this combat to take place, the royal party moved to a courtyard flanked by stands for spectators. After the contest, a young woman recited a long poem which explained that two maidens were being held by a tyrant in a tower guarded by two redoubtable knights. Charles IX and Henri duly took up the challenge. After they had vanquished the guards, the tower burst into flame and a great clap of thunder indicated that the tyrant's enchantments were no more.¹²

At Bayonne such entertainments were incidental, for serious business needed to be discussed by the French and Spanish participants. While Catherine's mind was focused on arranging marriages for her children, the duke of Alba was interested only in fighting heresy. At a council meeting on 30 June Charles IX promised to remedy the religious situation in France once the Grand Tour was over. The Spaniards, however, were not convinced of Catherine's willingness to do so. As for the Huguenots, they viewed the Bayonne meeting with deep suspicion. The meeting ended with only a semblance of accord. Henri, however, seems to have made a good impression on the Spaniards. Alba described him as 'one of the most accomplished princes for his age'. Once the meeting was over, he accompanied Elisabeth as far as Segura, 15 kilometres into Spain. Henri was never to see her again. He then rejoined the court at Saint-Jean-de-Luz for the last leg of the Grand Tour.¹³

From Saint-Jean-de-Luz the court travelled first to Biarritz, then by way of Dax and Mont-de-Marsan to Nérac where Catherine tried unsuccessfully to persuade Jeanne d'Albret, queen of Navarre, to restore Catholic worship in her kingdom of Navarre. Then, after crossing the Garonne at Tonneins, the court reached Angoulême on the 14 June. The town had for the most part embraced Protestantism, but the Governor, Lansac, persuaded its inhabitants to greet Charles IX in the customary way with a crucifix and banners. At the cathedral the king bowed before the tomb of his ancestor, Jean le Bon, count of Angoulême which the Huguenots had violated in 1562. The next main halt was Cognac, birthplace of King Francis I, where the court spent 11 days. It was here on 25 August that Charles IX ordered all the parlements to ensure that the Edict of Orléans was observed. By so doing he manifested his wish that the two faiths – Catholic and Protestant – should co-exist in France. Catherine de' Medici seemed satisfied as she wrote to the duchess of Guise from Cognac.

¹² Champion, *Catherine de Médicis présente à Charles IX son royaume*, pp. 58–64.

¹³ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III, roi shakespearien* (Paris: 1985), p. 74.

Each evening, she added, there was dancing: ‘and everyone dances, huguenots and papists together’. Resuming its progress on 1 September, the court travelled to La Rochelle where the population was mainly Protestant. It was customary for the king before entering the town to cut a silk ribbon stretched across the porte de Cougnes, but Montmorency had no time for this. Slashing through the ribbon with his sword, he asked the city magistrates if they had intended to prevent the king from entering the city. Before leaving it, Charles reminded the citizens of their duty to obey the recent Edict of Pacification by allowing the free exercise of the Catholic faith in their midst. There was less tension in Niort where the court arrived on 19 September. On learning that the Huguenot leader, Louis de Condé, was about to marry Françoise d’Orléans, daughter of the duc de Longueville, Catherine insisted on the ceremony taking place at court. Moving north, the court next visited Thouars and Champigny-sur-Veud, a château owned by Louis de Bourbon, duc de Montpensier, a fierce champion of the old faith. Catherine and her following then ventured into Brittany where François d’Anelot, a brother of Admiral Coligny, was actively promoting Protestantism. For 18 days the queen-mother was the guest of the constable Montmorency at Châteaubriant. After Brittany, Anjou must have come as a relief to the court. On 22 November Charles IX was warmly received at Tours, a strongly Catholic town noted for its silk industry. It was here, in the suburb of Saint-Côme, that he and his brother, Henri, were received by the poet, Pierre de Ronsard. He dedicated the following poem to Henri:

*Voici le lieu des peuples séparé,
Mal accoutré, mal bâti, mal paré,
Et toutefois les Muses y demeurent
Qui vont gardant que les princes ne meurent
Qui, comme vous, ont aimé la vertu!*

This, the home of the people, is apart,
Badly furnished, badly built, badly adorned,
Yet it is home to the Muses
Who see that the princes do not die
Who, like you, have loved virtue!

From Tours, the court moved to the beautiful château of Chenonceau where it stayed for three days. On 5 December, after passing through Amboise, it reached Blois. Then, resuming its progress on the 14 December it made its way across

the Sologne and Berry. After stopping at the Benedictine nunnery of Saint-Menoux and the church of Souvigny, where members of the house of Bourbon are buried, Charles IX and his court reached Moulins shortly before Christmas. It was here in the vast château, formerly the seat of the dukes of Bourbon, that the king summoned the princes and presidents of the 'sovereign courts' to consider important domestic matters. For three months from December 1565 to March 1566 Moulins became the temporary capital of France.

A most pressing matter was the bitter quarrel between the houses of Guise and Châtillon that had arisen following the assassination of François, second duc de Guise, outside Orléans in 1563. The assassin, Poltrot de Méré, had been captured and executed, but the Guises were convinced that he had acted on orders from the Huguenot leader, Admiral Coligny. On 12 January the latter appeared before the Council. Twenty-four state councillors examined the charge against him. Nineteen decided he was innocent and he was formally cleared of all the charges against him. Although the cardinal of Lorraine and Anne d'Este, Guise's widow, tacitly accepted the verdict, they continued to harbour feelings of revenge against the admiral.

Early in 1566 Henri chaired an assembly at Moulins that considered the administration of justice in the kingdom. The outcome was the Ordinance of Moulins which dealt with all aspects of government with the aim of strengthening royal authority and extending its limits. The parlements were forbidden to submit remonstrances in respect of royal legislation more than once if the king indicated that he wished to proceed regardless. Towns retained their criminal jurisdiction, but lost their civil jurisdiction. Alongside the criminal jurisdiction, a new form of justice was created that amounted to simple policing. Lastly, provincial governors were called to order: they were reminded that there was only one king and that they should not try to usurp his prerogatives by meddling in a wide range of matters administrative and judicial. Thus did the queen-mother and her chancellor try to check urban unrest and aristocratic disobedience. No better political lesson could have been given to Henri who at the age of 15 was fully capable of taking it in.

On 8 February 1566 Henri was given the apanage of Anjou, Bourbonnais and Maine which made him financially independent. He gave up the title of duc d'Orléans and took from his younger brother, François-Hercule, that of duc d'Anjou. François-Hercule now became duc d'Alençon, a title which he retained until he reverted to that of duc d'Anjou when Henri became king. Meanwhile, a matter of immediate concern to Catherine de' Medici was finding a suitable bride for Henri. At Bayonne, she had put forward the idea of his marrying Doña Juana,

the sister of Philip II of Spain. She hoped that in return for such an ill-assorted match (Juana being much older than Henri), the latter would be given a kingdom in the Milanese or Tuscany. But the duke of Alba at Bayonne had bluntly refused to discuss any of Catherine's matrimonial proposals, his only concern being the fight against heresy. Since Philip II would not entertain the possibility of a French marriage, Catherine sent an envoy to the king of Denmark, Frederick II, who had suggested that Henri might marry a Saxon princess. Such a move was seized upon by the Spanish ambassador, Francès de Alava, who, for reasons best known to himself, never lost an opportunity of blackening Henri's reputation. 'In order to advance the negotiations,' he wrote to Philip II on 20 February 1566, 'the soul of the duc d'Orléans has been changed.' Don Francès claimed that the prince was frequently seen conversing with the queen of Navarre and Coligny. 'I am assured that he no longer has any Catholic servants. Previously, following orders given by his mother, he attended mass with close attention, but now the reverse is true.'¹⁴ But whenever the ambassador complained to Catherine, she assured him that the king and his brother were devout Catholics. Don Francès, always ready to uncover some dastardly French plot, also imagined that Henri had taken under his protection the famous Corsican patriot, Sampiero Corso, who had successfully wrested his island from Genoese rule. On learning that nine galleys were being armed at Marseilles, he concluded that money, arms and munitions were being sent to Sampiero by the prince, but when, during an audience on 14 March, he told Catherine of the reports, she dismissed them as mere tittle-tattle and laughed at their absurdity. Soon after this audience, Charles IX and his court left Moulins, but, before returning to Paris, they visited a number of places in Auvergne and Nivernais. It was here, at the château of La Guerche, that Henri became acquainted with its owner, Louis de Gonzague, a member of the house of Gonzaga that ruled Mantua, who was 25 years old. On 4 March 1565, he had married Henriette de Clèves, heiress of the Nivernais and of the Rethelois, thereby becoming duc de Nevers. He was to become a good and trusted friend of Henry III when he found himself almost alone at the end of his reign.

On 10 April 1566 the royal caravan crossed the River Loire at La Charité. It spent five days there celebrating Easter before entering Brie. At Mons-en-Montois, Charles IX and Henri entertained the queen-mother, Admiral Coligny, d'Andelot and cardinal Châtillon in a curious way. The story is told by Claude Haton, the curé of Provins, in his *Memoirs*. After finding a Huguenot catechism and a book of psalms by Marot and de Bèze in their lodging, the king and his brother pretended to be a Huguenot and a preacher. Each accused the other of

¹⁴ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 82.

not playing his part well. 'You have neither the look nor the hypocrisy,' said the duke. 'You do not lift up your eyes upwards to see Christ.' 'And you,' retorted the king, 'do not join your ears correctly or turn your head. To be a good preacher it is better to join the ears than the hands as a donkey does when a heavy load is put on its back.' Charles then asked his brother: 'Are you not one of them?' To which Henri replied: 'No, but I know what they know and how they look. You must come to my school.' Whereupon the brothers tore up the catechism and psalms and threw the sheets into each other's face, saying: 'You do not know how to be a huguenot or a preacher. I can do them better than you!'¹⁵ This anti-Huguenot foolery is reminiscent of the anti-Catholic *masquerade* which the brothers had staged three years earlier. Both may be taken as a reflection of the troubled religious climate at the time. On 1 May 1566 Charles IX and his court returned to Paris having covered 910 leagues in the course of two years and four months.

Lieutenant-general of the Kingdom

The policy of limited toleration pursued by the French government since March 1563 seemed at first successful: France was more or less at peace by January 1567. As Claude Haton wrote: 'it seemed as if the peace ... was so consolidated that neither war nor troubles would ever arise again in France over religion'.¹⁶ For the Protestant writer, La Noue, 'the edict of pacification signed outside Orléans had given almost to the whole of France much contentment, as much in appearance as in effect, in that, all misery ceasing, everyone lived at peace, secure in body and free of mind'.¹⁷ But if this was true of France, the same could not be said of her northern neighbour. In August 1566 popular violence, fuelled by religion, erupted in the Spanish Netherlands. Calvinists burst into Catholic churches destroying altars and statues. Hearing of these troubles, Catherine de' Medici advised her son-in-law, Philip II, to follow her example 'who at our expense have shown to others how they should conduct their affairs'. But regardless of her advice, Philip ordered the duke of Alba to put down the unrest by force. The duke marched north from Milan along the

¹⁵ *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, ed. Laurent Bourquin (Paris, 2003), Vol. 2, pp. 14–15.

¹⁶ *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, Vol. 2, p. 93.

¹⁷ François de La Noue, *Discours politiques et militaires*, ed. F.E. Sutcliffe (Geneva, 1967), p. 676.

so-called 'Spanish Road' through Savoy, Franche-Comté and Lorraine at the head of ten thousand troops.¹⁸

The French Huguenots, who had viewed with suspicion the talks at Bayonne between Catherine and Alba, were alarmed. No one in France knew where Alba was heading for. The Spanish crown had not taken Charles IX into its confidence. It seemed possible that Alba would invade France in support of the Guise faction, for Philip II disapproved of the recent pacification. He wanted heresy wiped out. Charles IX for his part took no chances. In May 1567 he hired 6,000 Swiss mercenaries, ostensibly to defend France's northern frontier.¹⁹ The Huguenots, however, feared that the Swiss were being recruited as part of a grand Franco-Spanish plot to wipe them out. Their suspicions seemed confirmed when Charles IX failed to disband the Swiss troops after Alba had arrived in Brussels.

Alarmed by the turn of events, the Huguenot leaders met in secret at their homes. D'Anelot argued successfully for a pre-emptive strike.²⁰ Orders were sent out to all the Reformed churches to raise troops and send them to Rosay-en-Brie. Condé was put in charge of the operation. Its success, however, depended on secrecy being maintained, and this was not to be. On 4 September 1567 Catherine was told that 1,200 or 1,500 Huguenot cavalry had assembled near Montargis and Châtillon. Marshal Cossé was asked to investigate.²¹ Catherine refused at first to believe that all her peace-making efforts had been in vain. On 24 September, however, she and Charles IX, who were staying at Monceaux, were told that Huguenot troops had gathered at Rosay. This time they took the report seriously and decided to seek shelter within the walls of the neighbouring town of Meaux. The king's councillors then considered whether to stay put or move to Paris. Montmorency and L'Hôpital favoured the first option, but the duc de Nemours and the Guises successfully argued in favour of the second. Next day, at dawn, the court set off for the capital. Nemours led the march with the cavalry while the Swiss provided cover at the front and rear. At the entrance to the Lagny defile, the Huguenots appeared. Condé tried to engage the king in talks, but withdrew when confronted by the formidable array of Swiss pikemen. Later, at the exit to the defile, Montmorency and the Swiss kept the Huguenots

¹⁸ Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London, 1977), pp. 68–103.

¹⁹ Olivier Poncet, *Pomponne de Bellièvre (1529–1607). Un homme d'état au temps des guerres de religion* (Paris, 1998), pp. 31–7.

²⁰ La Noue, *Discours politiques et militaires*, pp. 677–83.

²¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1909), iii, pp. 53, 56–9.

at bay, while Charles and his mother went ahead to Paris.²² The king was angry: never again, he declared, would he allow anyone to frighten him. He swore to pursue the rebels in their houses and even their beds.²³ On reaching Paris, Catherine wrote several letters expressing surprise and anger at the Huguenot action. In a letter to the duke of Savoy she described the uprising, now known as the *Surprise de Meaux*, as the 'greatest wickedness in the world'.²⁴

After daring to pursue Charles IX and his court as far as Paris, Condé and the other Huguenot leaders compounded their offence by blockading the capital. They pitched camp at Saint-Denis and set fire to several windmills. Parisians rushed to take up arms and broke into Protestant homes looking for arsonists.²⁵ Simon Vigor, a fanatical Catholic preacher, denounced the Huguenots as traitors. Their faith, he said, had been established by the sword and would be destroyed by the sword.²⁶ Montmorency summoned Strozzi's infantry from Picardy and Brissac's from Lyons. He expected to have under his command 18,500 infantry and 9,700 horse.²⁷ Meanwhile, several towns, including Orléans and La Rochelle, declared for the Huguenots. In Nîmes, dozens of Catholics, including priests, were massacred. As both sides prepared for war, Condé issued a manifesto repeating demands made in 1562. He wanted the expulsion of Nemours and the Guises from the king's council, the exclusion from power of the queen-mother and the calling of the Estates-General. On 7 October, a royal herald appeared in Condé's camp and called on him, Coligny and their associates to appear before the king and admit their rebellion.²⁸ Severely shaken by the challenge, the Huguenot leaders presented a shorter list of demands to Montmorency. They asked for the Edict of Amboise to be enforced without restrictions on Huguenot worship, but the Constable would not consider a settlement that would leave France religiously divided.

²² Francis Decrue, *Anne de Montmorency* (Paris, 1889), pp. 461–3.

²³ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. La Ferrière and Baguenault de Puchesse, Vol. 3, pp. ix–x.

²⁴ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. La Ferrière and Baguenault de Puchesse, Vol. 3, p. 62.

²⁵ Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in sixteenth-century Paris* (New York and Oxford, 1991), pp. 80–81.

²⁶ Michel Simonin, *Charles IX* (Paris, 1995), pp. 174–5.

²⁷ Decrue, *Anne de Montmorency*, p. 464.

²⁸ Jules Delaborde, *Gaspard de Coligny, amiral de France* (Paris, 1879–82), ii, pp. 490–93; Henri, duc d'Aumale, *Histoire des Princes de Condé pendant les XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Paris, 1863–96), i., pp. 300.

As the prospect of war drew closer, the two sides were numerically very unequal. While the Huguenots disposed of 4,000 infantry and 2,000 horse, the royal army comprised 16,000 infantry, 3,000 horse and 18 cannon. Despite their numerical inferiority, however, the Huguenots operated on a wide front. They stopped food supplies from reaching Paris by seizing the bridge at Charenton. On 10 November, a barrage fired by the royal guns signalled the beginning of the battle of Saint-Denis during which the aged Constable, Anne de Montmorency, was fatally wounded.²⁹ Condé emerged from the battle with honour, but disposed of too few troops to continue blockading Paris. Abandoning his camp, he made a quick dash to Lorraine hoping to join forces with German mercenaries led by John Casimir of Bavaria, Count-Palatine. The king's army, comprising almost 38,000 troops, two-thirds infantry and one-quarter cavalry, prepared to pursue him.³⁰ Charles IX was persuaded to appoint his younger brother, Henri, duc d'Anjou, as Lieutenant-general of the kingdom and commander-in-chief of the royal army.³¹ He was given considerable powers over all military personnel, but, as he was only 16, he could not be left in sole charge of operations. The duc de Nemours was appointed to assist him. Henri also had a council of experienced captains. On 17 November he took his oath of office before the Parlement of Paris and next day informed the duc de Nevers of his appointment. 'I will strive to discharge my duties to the king's satisfaction and to ease the sufferings of his subjects as far as I can.'³² On 22 November he wrote to Pope Pius V saying, 'you will never find anyone who applies himself more willingly to defending the faith and to your service.' He added that he intended to make up for 'many lost opportunities' without specifying them.³³ On the eve of Henri's departure to join his army, Alava called to congratulate him on behalf of Philip II. He described the prince as 'very tall but rather too young to wield the authority he now enjoys.'³⁴ Following Henri's departure for Corbeil, his mother sent him an affectionate letter, urging him to take care of his health 'so that you may acquire the honour and renown which I wish you to have'. In the campaign that followed, Henri addressed a flood of letters and memoranda, mostly about money, supply and personnel, to various bodies and

²⁹ Decrue, *Anne duc de Montmorency*, p. 472.

³⁰ James B. Wood, *The King's Army; Warfare, Soldiers, and Society during the Wars of Religion in France, 1562–1576* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 71–2.

³¹ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 96.

³² *Lettres de Henri III*, ed. Michel François, Vol. 1, (Paris, 1959), No. 19, p. 11.

³³ *Lettres de Henri III*, ed. Michel François, Vol. 1, No. 21, pp. 11–12.

³⁴ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 97.

individuals.³⁵ We may be surprised that one so young should assume so much responsibility, but in an age when average life expectancy was so much shorter than it is today, adulthood began early.

The royal army, possibly because of its sheer size, failed to catch up with the enemy until 22 November near Châlons-sur-Marne. The Huguenots managed to slip away under cover of night and met up with John Casimir's force on 11 January 1568. Giving up the chase, Henri pitched camp at Vitry-le-François where he was joined by forces commanded by the dukes of Aumale and Nevers. By now the army was almost 60,000 strong, yet its commanders, remembering only too well the losses suffered by the *gendarmerie* at Saint-Denis, were reluctant to fight. Revoking an earlier order to bring the Huguenots to battle, Charles IX explained that 'at present, he did not wish to risk his kingdom or his nobles, who are not so strong that in risking a single battle enough of them would remain to him to fight a second in order to conserve his estate'. Henri was prepared to fight, but, in the end, Nevers's advice prevailed. 'A country kept,' he said, 'is worth more than a country lost, as it would be if we lost a single battle now'.³⁶ So the king's army engaged in Fabian tactics, hoping that the onset of winter and lack of funds would cause the enemy to melt away. The Huguenots, meanwhile, marched on Orléans, which had been theirs since the start of the war. On the way, they attacked and looted villages and small towns which refused to admit them. At the end of February, they besieged Chartres. An assault, launched on 7 March, was repulsed. While the Huguenot leaders could not afford to pay their German mercenaries, the crown could no longer support its huge army. Mutual exhaustion obliged both sides to negotiate. A truce was declared and Condé's army, much reduced by desertions, withdrew from Chartres. On 23 March 1568 the Peace of Longjumeau was signed.³⁷ This restored the Edict of Amboise without the additions restricting Protestant worship. Condé and his followers were promised a complete amnesty and, in secret articles, Charles IX undertook to help pay the wages of John Casimir's *reiters* who were soon disbanded. The settlement angered Catholics, who saw it as a return to the policy of limited religious toleration initiated by the Edict of Amboise. On the surface it seemed quite generous to the Huguenots, but, as future events were to suggest, it may have been a ploy. La Noue in his memoirs called it 'a wicked little peace'.³⁸ The Huguenots disbanded some of their forces, believing that the crown

³⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, pp. 14–42.

³⁶ Wood, *The King's Army*, p. 124–5.

³⁷ *Édits des guerres de religion*, ed. André Stegmann (Paris, 1979), pp. 53–8.

³⁸ La Noue, *Discours politiques et militaires*, pp. 708–12.

would do likewise, but this did not happen. Catholics remained under arms and continued to guard towns and river crossings. Usually, the crown reduced its army following a peace treaty, thereby placing itself at a serious military disadvantage if and when the peace broke down. This did not happen now. The crown did not demobilize in spite of the parlous state of its finances.

In May 1568 the Chancellor, Michel de l'Hôpital, 'finding himself striving against the stream' asked to be relieved of his office. His request was at first refused, then granted. On 7 October the royal seals were entrusted to Jean de Morvillier.³⁹ The chancellor's fall evidently reflected the disenchantment felt by the king and his mother with his policy of peaceful co-existence. The crown now chose the repression advocated by the cardinal of Lorraine and the Guises. The Huguenots had every reason to feel apprehensive. In the Netherlands, Alba waged a campaign of terror in which more than a thousand people were executed, including the counts of Egmont and Hoornes. As refugees poured into France, the Huguenots prepared to assist their Flemish co-religionists. In the summer of 1568 the French government acted when a force of Huguenots, led by François de Cocqueville, tried to assist them only to be crushed at Saint-Valéry by marshal Cossé. On hearing the news, Catherine de' Medici instructed Cossé to hand over his Flemish prisoners to Alba and to have the French ones executed or sent to the galleys. Speaking to the Spanish ambassador, she described the execution of Egmont and Hoornes as 'a holy decision' which she hoped soon to see repeated in France.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Henri, duc d'Anjou set about organizing his household. On 30 May 1568 he bought from the sieur de Villeroy a pleasant *hôtel* in Paris opposite the Louvre. It had an inner courtyard, a central block flanked by two pavilions and a garden.⁴¹ Henri's chancellor was Hurault de Cheverny, a humanist with a good head for figures, and the superintendant of his household, was his old tutor, François de Carnavalet. During the spring and summer of 1568 Henri divided his time between his camp at Chartreux-lès-Paris, the Louvre and the Hôtel de Laon where Charles IX and Catherine resided. From the end of June until 30 August he stayed with Catherine and the court at the château of Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne whence he wrote many letters to military chiefs and various provincial authorities.⁴²

³⁹ Seong-Hak Kim, *Michel de L'Hôpital*, pp. 166–8.

⁴⁰ Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, p. 235.

⁴¹ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 107.

⁴² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, Nos. 215–73, pp. 57–67.

The summer of 1568 was marked by a proliferation of Catholic leagues and confraternities in France. In addition to some that had already been set up in Burgundy, new ones were formed in Bourges, Orléans, Angers, Troyes and Le Mans. By mid-August the crown put itself at the head of the movement. The Huguenot leaders, Condé and Admiral Coligny, meanwhile, returned to their homes in Burgundy fearing for their lives. On 6 July Coligny warned the king that mob rule was undermining the monarchy. Later that month, he blamed the confraternities of the Holy Ghost 'for an infinity of massacres and murders since the pacification'. He accused Charles IX himself. 'It is well known,' he wrote, 'that the confraternities and leagues are planned and controlled by the provincial governors, and that means that they must have your approval or, at least, tacit consent.'⁴³ On 23 August Condé and Coligny fled from their homes with their families and an escort of 150 horsemen. As they made their way to La Rochelle, they were joined by a huge number of Huguenots with carts and waggons. The caravan reached its destination on 18 September where they were soon joined by Coligny's brother, François seigneur d'Andelot, bringing reinforcements from Normandy and Brittany; also by the queen of Navarre, Jeanne d'Albret, and her son, Henri, with Gascon troops. La Rochelle's situation on the Atlantic coast provided the Huguenots with easy access to their allies in England and the Netherlands. It also offered opportunities of privateering at the expense of Spanish and French Catholic shipping. On the landward side, La Rochelle was protected by a curtain wall and by marshes beyond.

It was on 28 August, while he was staying with Charles IX at the home of the secretary of state, Florimond Robertet, that Henri, duc d'Anjou learnt of the flight of the Huguenot leaders. Next day, Catherine secured confirmation of his appointment as Lieutenant-general of the kingdom with the special duty of defeating the Huguenot forces in western France. This was a heavy responsibility for one so young and physically frail. The Venetian ambassador, G. Carrero, painted the following picture of Henri in a report submitted to the Senate probably in 1568:

My lord, the duc d'Anjou, is slightly less than a year younger than the king. The latter was born on 26 June while the former's birthday is on 19 September. He is somewhat taller than His Majesty, but his legs are no stronger. His complexion is better and his mien far more agreeable. When His Highness was suffering from a fistula near his eye, he was told to drink only pure water. Though cured, he has

⁴³ Robert R. Harding, *Anatomy of a Power Elite: Provincial Governors of Early Modern France* (New Haven and London, 1978), p. 64.

got so used to that régime that he has not been able to drink wine for years. He enjoys hunting within the palace (grounds?) and enjoys staying with ladies. If he becomes attached to one of them, he does not give her up lightly ... He likes to give orders and has so much authority that if one did not know of his good understanding with the king, many would judge it to be too important. It is said that he will be successful in the army, as he suffers disagreement patiently. He does not fear danger and readily accepts the advice of those at his side. In time he may acquire judgment which is the fruit of experience. If he seems haughty at a first meeting, he turns out on closer acquaintance to be human and courteous, so that he is loved and much respected by everyone. And his attraction is enhanced by the knowledge that the queen, as all mothers do, favours him more than the others put together.⁴⁴

On 1 September 1568 Henri wrote to Jacques d'Humières, governor of Picardy: 'Monsieur d'Humières since the principal leaders of the so-called reformed religion have now openly taken up arms, thereby showing that they do not wish to maintain the peace which it has pleased God to give us, but, on the contrary, want to disturb it as they have done before, each governor must go to his circumscription and provide all that is necessary to its preservation and security under the obedience of the king my lord and brother.'⁴⁵ On 28 September Catherine de' Medici wrote: 'My son, the duc d'Anjou, will soon leave to take up his command and teach a lesson to those who wish to disturb the state.'⁴⁶ Next day, a huge and solemn procession took place in Paris. As was the custom on the eve of a war, the relics of Saint-Denis and his fellow martyrs, Rustique and Éleuthère, were removed from the abbey of Saint-Denis and taken to the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris where they were placed on the altar alongside the royal insignia until victory enabled the king to retrieve them. Walking in the procession was the cardinal of Lorraine, carrying the Blessed Sacrament, and Henri d'Anjou, as commander-in-chief of the army, carrying the crown.

The Huguenots used the autumn to enlarge the buffer zone between them and the king's forces by capturing as many towns as possible in Poitou. As Huguenots in the Midi mobilized, a royal force under the duc de Montpensier launched a surprise attack on Poitiers. He was soon joined by Henri with the main royal army. Damville commanded the van, Longueville the rearguard and Tavannes and Sansac the 'battle'. Fighting, however, petered out with the onset

⁴⁴ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 110.

⁴⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 278, pp. 68–9.

⁴⁶ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 110.

of winter. Meanwhile, on 28 September, two royal edicts were directed against the Huguenots: one banned all Protestant worship and ordered all pastors to leave the kingdom within a fortnight; the other forbade Huguenots holding any offices and charges. This was a complete reversal of the policy of peaceful co-existence inaugurated at Amboise in March 1563.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1569 the Catholic and Protestant armies met face to face along the river Charente. As Condé and Coligny planned to meet up in Quercy with an army recruited in the Midi, Henri watched their movements from the left bank. The Huguenots were for the time being content to guard the bridges crossing the river, but Marshal Tavannes, who was the effective commander of the king's army, crossed the river at Châteauneuf and attacked Coligny and the Huguenot van. Condé, who was with the 'battle' at Jarnac, rushed to his assistance. He charged impetuously at the head of 300 horse only to be soon overwhelmed by a much larger royal force. The prince surrendered but, recognizing him, Montesquiou, the captain of Henri's guard, murdered him with a shot in the head. According to Brantôme, Henri humiliated Condé by having his corpse carried off the field 'his arms and legs dangling' on the back of an ass. Other Protestant captains had their throats cut after the battle. On 13 March, Henri wrote to Charles IX from Jarnac: 'My Lord, you have won the battle. The prince of Condé is dead. I have seen his body.'⁴⁸ Next day, he wrote to the duke of Urbino: 'I have defeated their army and pursued it at a gallop for more than two long leagues.'⁴⁹ Henri also sent a detailed account of his victory by special courier to his mother assuring her that, in accordance with her wishes, he had written to the Pope, the Venetian government and 'all the potentates of Italy' informing them of his victory.⁵⁰ Writing from Segonzac on 17 March, he informed Charles IX that he had ordered that none of the prisoners taken in the battle should be set free for a ransom or for any other reason without his permission. He had sent a nobleman to the various regiments to find out how many prisoners they were holding and to draw up a list of them. He had also informed a large number of foreign princes and rulers, including the Swiss confederation and Queen Elizabeth of England 'believing it necessary that the truth to be known before our enemies attempt to disguise it and by means of lies retain the hearts and affection of their friends'. Henri also asked Charles to

⁴⁷ *Édits des guerres de religion*, ed. A. Stegmann, pp. 59–66; N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 170, 358.

⁴⁸ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 340, p. 87.

⁴⁹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 341, pp. 87–8.

⁵⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 344, pp. 89–90.

speed up the dispatch of 20 cannon needed to dislodge the enemy from Cognac and other fortified places where they had taken refuge. Finally, he informed Charles that he had sent him papers found in the pockets of Condé's boots along with an unsigned note found in his gauntlet.⁵¹ On 25 March Henri wrote to the Huguenot leader, Henri de Navarre, addressing him as 'my brother'. He acknowledged receipt of two letters from him. In the first, Navarre had asked him to treat his prisoners well 'as the king's good subjects' and, in the second, to return Condé's body so that it might be honoured. In his reply, Henri refused to accede to Navarre's first request. He explained that he would treat his prisoners well, but 'out of pity' and because they were 'people confused and abused'. As for Condé's body, it was with his parents who would do the necessary. Finally, Henri urged Navarre to rally to the side of Charles IX who 'given his kindness and your youth will embrace you and not allow you to be abused by those who are leading you where you can only act against His Majesty and your duty'. Religion, he added cryptically, was no longer an issue as recent events had shown.⁵² The Huguenots suffered few losses at Jarnac as only part of their army had been involved in the fighting. Admiral Coligny, now their sole commander, managed to retreat westward with his infantry virtually intact. The royal army set off in pursuit but had to stop outside Cognac as it had not yet received from Paris its siege guns. Meanwhile, Condé's son and Jeanne d'Albret's son, Henri, who were aged 15 and 16 respectively, were acclaimed as the Huguenots' new leaders, but everyone knew that they were only 'the Admiral's pages'. As princes of the blood, however, they gave the Huguenot cause legitimacy.

The French crown now had to face a new threat in the form of a German mercenary army led by Wolfgang of Bavaria, duke of Zweibrücken. Bypassing a royal army that had been waiting for him on the Meuse, Wolfgang sacked Beaune, crossed the Loire at La Charité and pushed through Berry and Marche. Although he died on 11 June, his troops managed to link up with the Huguenot army at Saint-Yriex. The opposing armies were now roughly equal in strength. Henri d'Anjou took up a position on the heights above La Roche-l'Abeille, leaving two of his regiments of foot in the valley below. These were now attacked and crushed by Coligny. He avenged Jarnac by taking few prisoners. Hundreds of local peasants were slaughtered on his orders. Henri was more compassionate. On 3 July he wrote to the count of Santa-Fiore complaining of the conduct of his Italian troops who were robbing the peasants of their cattle, horses and 'movable goods'. Such conduct, he said, could only damage the kingdom instead

⁵¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 345, pp. 90–94.

⁵² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 348, p. 95.

of preserving it. He ordered the count to discipline his troops 'on pain of their lives'.⁵³ On 12 July the Parlement declared the office of Admiral vacant, and in August ordered the confiscation of all the property of the Huguenot leaders. In September it condemned Coligny, placing the sum of 50,000 gold *écus* on his head.

The Admiral wanted to march north and capture Saumur as a first step towards carrying the war into the Paris region, but his German troops, keen as always to sack and loot, persuaded him to besiege Poitiers instead. The operation began on 24 July. The defenders now disposed of heavy artillery newly arrived from Paris and of cavalry under Henri, third duc de Guise. They flooded the meadows outside the town by diverting the course of the river Clain. A diversionary attack by Henri d'Anjou on Châtellerault gave Coligny a pretext for lifting the siege of Poitiers on 7 September. As he moved against the royal army, it retreated across the Cher and pitched camp at Chinon. Both armies were now in poor shape. By the end of September, however, the crown's efforts to raise more troops had begun to pay off. The king's army was now about 26,000 strong. On 3 October it engaged the enemy at Moncontour. The result was another royal victory. Wounded in the face, young Condé had to retire from the field. His cavalry fled and the German infantry surrendered only to be massacred by the king's Swiss troops. Whereas royal casualties were few, Huguenot losses numbered about 10,000. They lost more than 100 standards as well as most of their baggage and artillery. Catherine de' Medici thanked God for allowing her son, Henri, to be the instrument of such a victory, but Charles IX, jealous of his brother's success, lost no time in joining the army to share in its glory. Tavannes now pressed Henri to pursue the enemy but the duke preferred to mop up the towns that commanded the approaches to La Rochelle. On 16 October he laid siege to Saint-Jean d'Angély with an army much reduced in size: it was only about 3,000 strong. The artillery lacked horses, powder and cannon-balls and unpaid soldiers were deserting. The garrison of Saint-Jean d'Angély threw back several assaults. By 2 December the king's army had become a mere rump and Henri decided that he might as well grant the defenders an honourable surrender.

Admiral Coligny, meanwhile, had marched south where the Huguenots remained strong following a number of military successes in that area. Within a short time he was joined by thousands of troops. From 22 January to 20 February he laid siege to Toulouse, albeit unsuccessfully. Coligny then toyed with the idea of blockading Bordeaux, but decided instead to take the war nearer to Paris. In the meantime, peace talks began between the crown and

⁵³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 390, pp. 110–11.

the rebels. Henri strongly believed in the need for peace, even if this meant making some concessions to the Huguenots. He stated this clearly in a letter, dated 14 December, and sent in the highest secrecy to Marshal Tavannes. 'We want peace desperately,' he wrote, 'I pray God to inspire them so that it may soon be achieved ... [but the Huguenots] want to keep their services and we don't want them to. As long as this situation continues we shall get nowhere, but in the end we shall have to give way for the world is so tired of war that it cannot go on. If they will not accept our terms, then we shall have to compromise.' This, Henri realized, would not please the cardinal of Lorraine who, since July, had regained his authority in the king's council. Everyone was awaiting the return of Huguenot negotiators who had gone to consult Jeanne d'Albret about the terms they had been offered. Their return was keenly awaited. When talks would resume, Henri continued, 'each side will try to cheat the other, but we have been so often cheated in the past that this time we shall be on our guard, for, as you know, a scalded cat fears cold water'. Henri was anxious to see peace restored as he wanted to return to Paris. He was reasonably optimistic as he did not believe the Huguenots could remain so stubborn. 'Listening to them,' he wrote, 'one would think they had won the war and that they had beaten us, not us them.'⁵⁴ The peace negotiations begun in December 1569 came to fruition on 8 August when peace was signed at Saint-Germain.

⁵⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 449, pp. 135–7.

Chapter 3

Catholic Hero

Following the surrender of Saint-Jean d'Angély in December 1570, Charles IX disbanded his army and engaged talks with the Huguenot rebels which were to last on and off until August. But, mindful of what had happened after the peace of Longjumeau, they wanted solid guarantees that a new peace treaty would be honoured. Coligny had his doubts.¹ The court, meanwhile, moved to Angers where it stayed for three months. Henri duc d'Anjou was now acclaimed as a Catholic hero. Though Marshal Tavannes was mainly responsible for the victories of Jarnac and Moncontour, Henri had shown soldierly qualities: he had risked his life in battle and endured the hardships of camp life through a harsh winter. Though jealous of his younger brother's success, Charles IX appointed him *intendant général du roi*, a new office equivalent to that of viceroy. Writing on 5 December, Henri expressed the hope that his new position would lighten the burden being carried by his mother. He was soon countersigning Charles IX's commands. On 22 February, the Spanish ambassador, Don Francès de Alava, noted that whereas the king thought of nothing but sport, festivities and his forthcoming marriage, Henri was constantly busy with affairs of state and attending the king's council. He used his new powers to reward Tavannes with an annuity of 2,000 francs. This, he explained, was not to buy his loyalty, 'but because, having been in two battles, I have acquired so much honour and renown by your advice'.²

During its stay at Angers, the court became the venue for various entertainments, including tournaments. In one of these, Henri was wounded fighting the German captain, Gaspard von Schomberg. His left shoulder was dislocated. Writing to Charles IX, he reassured him, adding that he still had one arm with which to serve him. Relations within the royal family at this time have aroused much speculation. The evidence, however, needs critical handling. Much of it rests on dispatches sent by Alava to Philip II or the duke of Alba. The ambassador was an incorrigible gossip with strong personal likes and dislikes.

¹ Junko Shimizu, *Conflict of Loyalties: Politics and Religion in the Career of Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France, 1519–1572* (Geneva, 1970), pp. 127–8.

² Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III* (Paris, 1985), pp. 128–9.

On 5 February he reported that Charles IX had been heard to say: 'No one accompanies me. Everyone turns to my brother.'³ On 10 January 1570 Henri wrote to François duc d'Alençon, complaining of reports emanating from his circle to the effect that he and Charles had fallen out. Such reports, he said, were utterly false. 'The king, thank God, is a good king and brother to me,' he wrote. 'He honours me with all possible demonstrations of friendship and only two days ago gave me 80,000 *livres* of *rentes* for the services I had rendered to him.' He asked for those who had spread the reports to be severely punished.⁴ On 4 March Alava reported that Henri had become the bosom friend of Henri duc de Guise. 'He will not make one step without calling for him,' he wrote, 'and they sleep together several times.'⁵ Many years later, Henri's sister, Marguerite, recalled in her *Memoirs*, how, when she fell ill at Angers, Henri came to her bedchamber each day with Guise 'whom he professed to love very much.' He would kiss him, saying 'would be to God that you were my brother!'⁶ In the light of future events these recollections are not without interest.

Following its stay at Angers, Charles IX and his court visited Châteaubriant in Brittany, then Gaillon and Anet in Normandy before returning to Saint-Germain. In July, peace talks with the Huguenots entered a new phase when they agreed to discuss the right of worship on the basis of the edict of January 1562. A settlement soon followed. The Peace of Saint-Germain, signed on 8 August 1570, marked for the Huguenots a definite advance on earlier settlements. They were now granted four security towns – La Rochelle, Montauban, La Charité and Cognac – for two years. In addition, they were allowed freedom of worship where it had taken place before the war; also in two towns per *gouvernement* and in the homes of noblemen with superior rights of justice. But Protestant worship was still banned in Paris and at court. Huguenots were also to be admitted to all universities, schools and hospitals; they were to have their own cemeteries and were given certain privileges designed to protect them from unfair judgments by the parlements. All confiscated property and offices were to be turned.⁷

³ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p.134.

⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 455, p. 138.

⁵ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 135.

⁶ *Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois: la reine Margot*, ed. Yves Cazaux (Paris, 1971), p. 49.

⁷ André Stegmann, *Édits des guerres de religion*, (Paris, 1979), pp. 69–81; N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven and London, 1980); Penny Roberts, *Peace and Authority during the French Religious Wars* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 36–7.

Henri d'Anjou declared himself satisfied with the peace. He formally swore to observe it and ordered Marshal de Matignon to report any breaches of the peace committed by Catholics or Protestants. At the same time, he oversaw payments to the Swiss and *reiters*. But, if Alava is to be believed, Henri also had other things on his mind. 'The ladies,' he wrote, 'cluster around him, calling him handsome. I have been told that he attached to a certain Rouet [Louise de La Béraudière] who subjugates him ... so that the duke ... seems much softened'. On 6 November Alava described him as 'handsomeness personified'. At their last meeting he noticed that Henri had 'two earrings with emeralds larger than any African Moor has. A few days ago, the king, his brother, also had some, but only with one stone each. The same day Charles IX had ordered fifty or sixty noblemen, including an old man of sixty, to have their ears pierced, but four days later he had ordered the earrings to be removed'.⁸

The 'Public Whore'

The return of peace offered Catherine de' Medici the chance to do what she liked doing best: arranging advantageous marriages for her children.⁹ Charles IX was already engaged to Elizabeth of Austria. Henri would have liked to fetch her in Vienna, but this mission was entrusted to Albert de Gondi, duc de Retz, who had first-hand experience of the Imperial court. Elizabeth, aged only 16, was handed over to her fiancé outside Sedan on 21 November. The marriage ceremony took place at Mézières on the same day. Henri, his brothers and sister wore a costume of silver cloth adorned with pearls and lined with fur. After lunch, the new queen danced for her husband and her sister-in-law, Claude de Lorraine, danced for Henri. A few days later, Alava reported that the countess of Arenberg, who had accompanied Elizabeth, had expressed admiration for the duc d'Anjou, praising his looks, kindness and 'outstanding valour'.¹⁰

On the way back from Mézières, the French court stopped for some days at Villers-Cotterêts where Charles IX and Henri took part in another mock battle. This time they defended a castle against an assault led by François d'Alençon and the duc de Lorraine. The queen-mother, however, had more serious matters in mind. Having provided for her eldest son, she needed to do likewise for her

⁸ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 141.

⁹ Arlette Jouanna, *La Saint Barthélemy: Les mystères d'un crime d'État* (Paris, 2007), pp. 61–72.

¹⁰ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 142.

other children. Three ideas had been floated: for Henri to marry Elizabeth I of England, for Alençon to marry the daughter of Augustus of Saxony and for Marguerite to marry the prince of Béarn. Now that the Huguenots and Catholics had sunk their differences, it seemed sensible to bring together France, England and the Empire. Lord Buckhurst had just come to court bearing a wedding gift for Charles IX from Elizabeth I of England and Catherine seized the opportunity of talking to him about a possible marriage between Henri and Queen Elizabeth. Not everyone, however, shared her enthusiasm for the proposed match, least of all Henri himself. Elizabeth favoured the Huguenot cause, offering asylum to some of its leaders, and she had been excommunicated by Pope Pius V. But Catherine brushed aside these objections. Nor was she concerned about the wide difference of age between Henri and Elizabeth: he was 19 and she 37, too old one would have thought for risk-free child-bearing. Catherine did not think so: Elizabeth, she said, had another six or seven years 'especially if she had as good a stud as the duc d'Anjou'. Nor was she put off by rumours that Elizabeth was not a virgin. 'Although the duc d'Anjou had spoken to her about this,' she said, 'it was necessary to press ahead in order to secure greatness and power. Steps will be taken after the marriage to end these disorders.' Nor did the difference of religion concern Catherine unduly. She thought it called for a sacrifice. One observer thought she 'wanted her son crowned at any price'. As for Henri himself, he remained silent whenever his mother spoke to him about the proposal. Accused of stubbornness, he said that pleased as he was that marriage talks were taking place, he would not rejoice over their outcome if they obliged him to marry a 'public whore' (*putain publique*).¹¹

When La Mothe-Fénelon, the French ambassador at the English court, offered Henri's hand to Queen Elizabeth, she thanked him but indicated that she could not marry without seeing him first. She invited Henri to come to England, but explained that, for the time being, he could not be given a safe-conduct or have his security guaranteed. Elizabeth, who resented the support that Mary Queen of Scots was receiving from French Catholics, may have welcomed the initiative taken by Charles IX and Catherine de' Medici. The Huguenots, for their part, were much in favour of the English marriage and the renegade Cardinal de Châtillon, who was an exile in England, pressed for it diligently. On 30 April 1571 Alava wrote to the duke of Alba: 'the duc d'Anjou speaks of his

¹¹ Pierre Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III, 1551–1571* (Paris, 1941–42), Vol. 1, p. 316; Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 143–5; Denis Crouzet, *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy. Un rêve perdu de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1994), p. 282; N.M. Sutherland, *Princes, Politics and Religion, 1547–1589* (London, 1984), pp. 73–96.

English marriage as a *fait accompli*. Two negotiations were afoot, he explained: one secret, the other public. The first was being conducted by La Mothe Fénelon on behalf of Catherine; the other concerned the French bodyguard Henri wished to bring to England, his coronation and the Catholic faith that he and his household wished to continue practising there. On 2 May the ambassador reported that the marriage had been settled and a search underway for 300,000 écus needed by Henri. It was agreed that he would be crowned, the marriage would be a Catholic ceremony, and husband and wife would each be allowed to follow their own religion thereafter. Philip II, however, found all this hard to swallow. On 10 May he wrote to Alava: 'I still share your opinion: namely, that despite all the talk, it will never take place, for I am persuaded that what is being treated on both sides is stone cold.'¹² Henri, for his part, made no secret of his opposition to a marriage which he felt would destroy his leadership of the Catholic party in France. When Charles IX announced that he hoped to strengthen his accord with the Huguenots by meeting them in Brittany, Henri said that he did not trust them. When told that the Huguenot leaders would soon be coming to Blois, he said that if they did so he would go to Paris. On 16 May Alava reported a conversation overheard between Henri and one of his lady friends: 'The queen my mother,' he had said, 'seems upset that my marriage has not taken place, but I am the happiest man in the world to have escaped being married to a public whore.'¹³

On 19 June Alava informed Philip II that Elizabeth's conditions for the marriage had arrived in France and, soon afterwards, he reported that a quarrel had broken out between Charles IX and Henri d'Anjou. While the latter was openly siding with the Catholics, his followers accused the king of favouring the Huguenots. A few days later, the ambassador reported: 'The duc d'Anjou has said repeatedly that he knew very well that the terms he would receive would not match his wishes: and that, even if they did, he would not marry Elizabeth for fear of being thought a bad gentleman (*Por mal caballero*).' But Henri had to conform to diplomatic niceties. On 31 July he wrote to Elizabeth in his own hand a letter as fulsome as it was dishonest. He thanked her for some kind remarks (*honnêtes propos*) she had spoken about him and, in return, said that he would never rest until she had been assured of his love and passionate desire to serve her. And, if the difficulties which she had raised prevented the conclusion of what he most desired, he wished her to know that not a day in his

¹² Arch. Nat., K. 1523, B31.

¹³ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 144.

life would pass in which he would not acknowledge his debt to her or remain her affectionate servant.¹⁴

On 1 August Henri thanked Lord Burghley for his good offices in the current negotiations. About the same time he wrote to François de Noailles, bishop of Dax, who was about to take up his post as French ambassador at the Ottoman Porte, asking him to promote Henri's interest in one of three kingdoms: England, part of Cyprus and Venetian dependencies along the Adriatic. But the letter was written in the third person and Noailles was asked to burn it after reading it!¹⁵

Henri's true feelings were far removed from the sentiments expressed in his letters to Elizabeth and Lord Burghley. On 10 August Alava reported that Catherine had again spoken to Henri of the English marriage. He had asked her to drop the subject as he would not obey her. Soon afterwards, news reached France that Elizabeth was unwilling to allow Henri's suite to practise the Catholic faith for fear of provoking a revolt among her subjects. Although she was prepared to allow masses to be celebrated in closed rooms, the talks seemed to be getting nowhere. On 14 August cardinal Caiazzo informed the papal secretary of state: 'The English marriage will not take place much to the displeasure of the Huguenots who hoped that it would separate 'Monseigneur' (i.e. Henri) from the king'. The purpose of the marriage, so the cardinal believed, had been to get Henri out of France so as to allow the Huguenots to seize the king and his realm. He praised him for saying to his mother and brother: 'I do not wish to offend God, my conscience and my own honour by marrying a loose woman who is also the enemy of the Catholic faith into which I was born and brought up and in which I wish to live and die like all my predecessors.'¹⁶

The papers of Lord Burghley contain a document, dated 28 August, listing 'new terms' for submission to the French ambassador. They require the duc d'Anjou to conform to the Anglican faith in acts of public worship with the queen, although he might continue to practise his own faith in private. Following a period of religious instruction, Henri was expected to embrace his wife's faith. Such terms were evidently designed to be rejected. Yet the talks dragged on and various rumours continued to circulate. It was said, for instance, that Charles IX had assured Henri that if he became king of England, he would support him with all the military forces at his disposal. Yet, in September, the Spanish ambassador wrote to Philip II the following assessment of the situation:

¹⁴ P.R.O., State Papers, Foreign, Elizabeth, 119, p. 57; *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 581, p. 173.

¹⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 583 bis, pp. 174–5.

¹⁶ Vatican archives: Nunz. Di Francia, Vol. IV, fol. 149.

The Queen of England and her councillors will always make a great show of wanting the marriage with the duc d'Anjou, and M. de Foix will do everything to show that he is not being frustrated ... but I reckon that the affair is as intractable as if I wished to marry the English queen! The duc d'Anjou has sabotaged this affair by several public statements criticizing the said queen for her dishonesty, evil mind and hypocrisy. And even more because the duc d'Anjou has learned that the marriage was prepared and pushed by the Admiral and Montmorency in order to get him out of the kingdom and seize control of military matters; for otherwise they would not be able to take the army away from him or to capture the king and occupy the position they covet...¹⁷

The collapse of the negotiations for Henri's marriage to Queen Elizabeth caused the French authorities to fear that she might marry a son of the Holy Roman Emperor. This would inevitably lead to a rapprochement of England with Spain. It was to avert such a threat that Henri's younger brother, François duc d'Alençon, was now put forward as a possible husband for Elizabeth.

While the English marriage was still under discussion, Catherine de' Medici tried to arrange a marriage for her daughter, Marguerite, with Henri, prince of Navarre, but his fanatically Protestant mother, Jeanne d'Albret, needed to be won over to the idea. Someone who might achieve this was Louis of Nassau, the brother of William of Orange, who was anxious to win French military backing for the Dutch revolt against Spain. A secret meeting between Charles IX, Catherine and Louis took place at the château of Lumigny, near Blois, on 19 July 1571. Soon afterwards, they held more talks at Fontainebleau. Louis pleaded the cause of the Dutch rebels. Charles seemed willing to oblige, particularly when his mother was not present.¹⁸ Encouraged by the new attitude of Charles IX and his mother, Admiral Coligny, the leader of the Huguenots, decided to return to court. He was received in a friendly way by the king and queen-mother at Blois on 12 September. Henri d'Anjou was polite, as usual. Catherine indicated that she was prepared to erase the past if the Admiral proved to be the king's good subject and zealous servant. Coligny was readmitted to the king's council.¹⁹ But if Catherine was prepared to discuss domestic issues with the Huguenots, she drew the line at any attempt by Coligny to lure Charles IX into a war with Spain. She could not afford to turn her back on the Huguenot

¹⁷ Champion, *La jeunesse d'Henri III*, Vol. 1, pp. 318–20.

¹⁸ N.M. Sutherland, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the European Conflict, 1559–72* (London, 1973), p. 175.

¹⁹ Michel Simonin, *Charles IX* (Paris, 1995), p. 265.

leaders whose support she needed to make her daughter queen of Navarre, but she resented the pressure they were putting on Charles to support their Dutch co-religionists.

His task was not made any easier by their truculent attitude.²⁰ But in the end concessions paid off: Jeanne d'Albret's fierce opposition to her son's marriage to Marguerite de Valois was overcome.

In the meantime, Henri d'Anjou continued to act as Lieutenant general of the kingdom. Although generally recognized as leader of the Catholic 'party', he dutifully carried out the king's wishes even if this meant making concessions to the Huguenots. He wrote to the Parisian authorities complaining of their slowness in obeying Charles IX's order for the removal of the Cross of Gastines and to Jean de La Valette, ordering him to stop obstructing the evacuation of Lectoure due to be handed back to Jeanne d'Albret.²¹ But while he acted in support of royal policy, Henri had strong views of his own which he expressed in a letter to Charles IX written from Châtellerault on 24 January. The inhabitants of Montauban had agreed to submit to the king but only on certain conditions which they had communicated to Coligny. Henri dismissed these as wholly unreasonable. He was prepared to allow the Huguenots their lives and property, but not freedom of worship and rejected outright the claim that their churches formed a single body. His position contradicted the terms of the peace of Saint-Germain. Montauban was a preponderantly Protestant city where Huguenots had worshipped publicly since before the last war.²²

Although Henri d'Anjou continued to act as the king's loyal deputy, there is evidence of a parting of the ways. Like Catherine de' Medici, he was resolutely opposed to any armed intervention by France in support of the Protestant rebels in Flanders and clearly dismayed to see Charles IX falling under the spell of Admiral Coligny who maintained that fighting Spain would be the best way of making the French forget their religious differences. Being jealous of Henri's martial renown, Charles was undoubtedly tempted by the prospect of leading a military campaign of his own. In June 1572 he ordered the fleet Philippe Strozzi had assembled at the mouth of the Gironde to set sail for the Low Countries. The duc de Nevers informed Henri that he had warned the king that a war would prove long, dangerous and costly. Henri approved of Nevers's action. 'There is much talk here of war,' he wrote, 'but I am trying to stifle these rumours

²⁰ Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 1991), p. 88.

²¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, Nos. 595, 597 and 598, pp. 179–80.

²² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 606, p. 182–83.

as far I can. I say that the king does not want it. I am lying as the king and all of you must do to stop this rumour which could precipitate a war.'²³ Henri's stance gained him the approval of the new Spanish ambassador to France, Don Diego de Zuñiga. On 31 March 1572 he reported: 'The duc d'Anjou who is ... the principal minister and soldier, the queen-mother's favourite, seems well disposed towards my purposes and fights the Huguenots with valour. For these reasons I hold him in high regard...'²⁴

According to Brantôme, Admiral Coligny was confident that before long the French would have driven the Spaniards out of the Low Countries and Charles IX would be ruling in their place; but it seems that the latter was no longer so sure. He ordered the governor of Picardy to forbid any French soldier from crossing the border on pain of losing his life and property and, on 31 May 1572, assured the Spanish ambassador of his wish to remain at peace with Philip II. When Coligny wanted to assist Nassau, who was besieged in Mons, Charles forbade him to leave the court. The Admiral, however, would not give up.²⁵ At a council meeting he argued that armed intervention in the Netherlands was the only way of uniting the French in a common cause, but Henri d'Anjou argued against such a move. He pointed to France's miserable condition: her lack of troops and resources, and the ruinous state of her border fortresses. The Admiral, however, arranged for the dispatch on 12 July of 4,000 troops under the command of the seigneur de Genlis. But five days later they were routed by a Spanish force as they were heading for Mons. News of their defeat came as a terrible blow to Coligny and his circle. The event convinced Catherine of the urgent need to save the peace.

At a council meeting on 10 August Coligny once again pressed for an armed intervention in the Low Countries. Morvillier pointed to certain difficulties; notably the unwillingness of the German Protestant princes and Queen Elizabeth I to join a war against Philip II. In the face of defeat, Coligny said to Charles IX: 'I can no longer oppose your wishes, but I am sure that you will live to regret them.' Turning to Catherine, he said: 'Madam, the king refuses to go to war. May God spare him another from which he will not be able to extricate himself!'²⁶ The Admiral, however, continued surreptitiously to recruit troops. This not only flouted the council's decision, but also defied the king's ban on troops crossing the kingdom's northern border. By now Catherine may well have decided that

²³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 627, pp. 189–90.

²⁴ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 154.

²⁵ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, p. 281; Jouanna, *La Saint Barthélemy*, pp. 86–8.

²⁶ Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, p. 282.

the time had come to get rid of Coligny. He had tried to elbow her from power and was now endangering the kingdom's peace and security. But how was he to be removed? He could be arrested and tried, but this was likely to reopen the nation's wounds and provoke a new Huguenot rising. So another means had to be found of getting rid of him without the king's consent. A possible way out was to enlist the support of the Guises who harboured a deep-seated hatred of the Admiral. Such a move would restore Catherine's authority as well as pitting the two houses of Châtillon and Guise against each other. They might wipe each other out, leaving the way clear for the king to rule supreme.

The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre

Meanwhile the Huguenot nobility gathered in Paris for the wedding of their leader Henri de Navarre and the king's sister, Marguerite. On the evening of 17 August 1572 she left the Louvre to sleep at the episcopal palace next to Notre-Dame cathedral. The wedding followed next day. The bride was led to the cathedral by her two brothers, Henri d'Anjou and François d'Alençon, and by four high-ranking noblemen. She wore a crown and a blue gown with a long train carried by three princesses. Marguerite joined Henri de Navarre in full view of the public on a wooden gallery that had been erected outside the cathedral's west front. And it was here that they were married by the cardinal de Bourbon. Then after entering the cathedral, they walked along a gallery that had been erected along the centre of the nave. On seeing flags taken at Jarnac and Moncontour hanging above the nave, Coligny was heard to say: 'Soon we shall tear them down and replace them with others that will be more agreeable to see!'²⁷ At the entrance to the choir Navarre, accompanied by his entourage of Huguenot noblemen, left the cathedral. They waited outside for some four hours until the mass was finished. Navarre kissed his bride in front of the royal family and escorted her to the episcopal palace where they were given a light meal. The whole court then rode in open carriages to the Palais de la Cité where a huge banquet was served at the *Table de marbre* in the *Grande Salle*. A large crowd of Parisian dignitaries were among the guests. The banquet was followed by a ball and a procession of silver chariots bearing large rocks. Three carried Charles IX and his brothers as well as gods and aquatic monsters. During intervals French

²⁷ Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Henri IV* (Paris, Fayard, 1982), p. 180.

verses written by eminent poets were sung by musicians. The newlyweds then retired to a nuptial chamber within the palace.²⁸

On Tuesday 19 August the new couple and their guests got up late. They reassembled at 3 p.m. at Henri d'Anjou's *hôtel* in the rue des Poulies. Dancing followed at the Louvre. On Wednesday, the court attended another spectacle in the great hall of the Petit Bourbon, near the Louvre. The scenery evoked a medieval mystery play with Paradise on the right, Hell on the left and, in the centre, the Elysian Fields where nymphs frolicked as they awaited the arrival of a hero. As a group of knights errant, led by Henri de Navarre, tried to enter Paradise they were driven into Hell by Charles IX and his brothers. Mercury then descended from Heaven accompanied by Cupid who congratulated the victorious knights and guided them to the Elysian Fields where they and the nymphs performed a ballet. The assembled company then decided to set free the knights, who had been biding their time in Tartarus. A few lances were broken before fireworks consumed the scenery. Thus 'the king had repulsed and driven the Huguenots into Hell from which they had only been able to leave through the intercession of Love'. On August 21 lists were set up in the courtyard of the Louvre as well as a grandstand for ladies. Charles IX, his brothers, the 'batard d'Angoulême' and Henri de Guise appeared, dressed as Amazons. Their opponents – Navarre and his troop – were dressed as Turks.²⁹ A modern reader can only wonder at the Huguenots' willingness to be portrayed first as damned spirits, then as infidels!

About 11 a.m. on Friday 22 August 1572 Admiral Coligny was returning on foot from the Louvre where he had attended a council meeting, chaired in the king's absence by his brother Henri d'Anjou, when a shot was fired from the window of a house. The Admiral would have been killed, if at that moment he had not bent down to adjust a shoe. The bullet fractured his left arm and tore off the index finger of his right hand. Some friends who were with him rushed into the house where the shot had been fired, but the assailant had fled leaving behind a smoking arquebus at an open window. Coligny was carried to his *hôtel* in the rue de Bthesis where the famous surgeon, Ambroise Paré, attended to his wounds. Later that day, Henri de Navarre and Henri de Condé called on Charles IX to demand justice. The king promised to punish those responsible for the crime and set up a commission of enquiry. That afternoon, he, his mother, brothers and a few courtiers called on the Admiral at his lodging. The king offered to have him carried to the Louvre, but Coligny declined. Charles then ordered a guard

²⁸ Babelon, *Henri IV*, pp. 180–81; Jouanna, *La Saint Barthélemy*, pp. 93–8.

²⁹ Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, pp. 181–2.

of arquebusiers to be posted outside the Admiral's *hôtel* and for accommodation to be found nearby for as many Huguenot noblemen as possible. He also wrote to the provincial governors, announcing the attempt on Coligny's life, his own determination to punish those responsible and reaffirming his wish to abide by the last edict of pacification.³⁰

Coligny's would-be assassin has been identified as Charles de Louviers, seigneur de Maurevert, a petty nobleman and adventurer, who had once been a servant of the Guises. In October 1569 he had murdered the sieur de Mouy, one of Coligny's lieutenants. The house from which the Admiral was shot had been rented by Pierre de Villemur, Henri de Guise's former tutor, and Maurevert had been introduced there by François de Villiers, seigneur de Chailly, *surintendant* to the duke. So there are good reasons for thinking that Maurevert committed the crime, not simply on his own account, but at the instigation of the Guises. Writing to Mothe-Fénelon, his ambassador in England, Charles IX attributed the crime to the enmity between the houses of Châtillon and Guise. The Spanish ambassador, Zuñiga, on the other hand, thought it had been ordered by Charles IX at his mother's instigation. Guise is said to have described the attack on Coligny as 'a mine laid by the duke of Alba'. Another suspect was the duchesse de Nemours, the widow of François duc de Guise, who blamed Coligny for her husband's murder. Among other suspects was Henri d'Anjou. 'The wisest heads,' reported Cavriana 'see the hand of Henri d'Anjou in the attempt', a view echoed by the Florentine Tomasso Sassetti. He linked Henri's name with those of the king, the queen-mother and the duc de Nevers.³¹

No one will ever know who ordered the Admiral's assassination. Henri d'Anjou cannot be shown to have shared in the crime, but his role in subsequent events is clearer. It seems that when the Admiral's friends called on Charles IX on the afternoon of 22 August to demand justice, they indicated that, if need be, they were prepared to take the law into their own hands. The atmosphere in Paris became explosive. During the afternoon of 23 August the king's council met to discuss the situation. At all cost it had to prevent an armed insurrection by the Huguenot nobles who had come to Paris for Navarre's wedding. Even if they blamed the Guises for what had happened, they could not rule out the possibility of a betrayal by the crown. On the afternoon of 23 August and far into the night, the council discussed the matter. No record exists of the opinions expressed. The councillors, it seems, considered the option of resorting to an 'ordinary' judicial process, but decided that the capital's feverish mood ruled this

³⁰ Jouanna, *La Saint Barthélemy*, pp. 99–101.

³¹ Jouanna, *La Saint Barthélemy*, pp. 106–15.

out. They chose instead to remove the threat of an uprising by exterminating the Huguenot nobles.

A list of intended victims may have been drawn up. If so, it would have contained some 50 names of persons to be found in three places in Paris: in the rue de Béthisy at the Admiral's residence and adjoining houses; at the Louvre where some Huguenot nobles were staying as the king's guests; and in the faubourg Saint-Germain, where Huguenot captains had gathered. Late on 23 August, the *prévôt des marchands*, Jean Le Charron, was summoned to the Louvre. He was ordered to close the gates of the capital, to immobilize boats along the right bank of the Seine, to arm members of the urban militia and hold them ready in different districts of the capital and to dispose of cannon in and outside the Hôtel de Ville. The execution began before dawn on 24 August in the rue de Béthisy and at the Louvre. The duc de Guise led a troop to kill Coligny at his residence. According to Petrucci he obeyed an order given by Charles IX or, according to Étienne Pasquier, by Henri d'Anjou.³² The latter's Swiss troops were part of the squad. As it arrived, Cosseins, the captain of the Anjou's arquebusiers who had been posted outside Coligny's *hôtel*, forced open the doors with the help of the Swiss. After killing soldiers inside the building, one of them pierced Coligny with his sword. The Admiral's body was then thrown out of the window. It fell at the feet of the duc de Guise who is said to have kicked it. It was then dragged through the streets of Paris before being hanged by the feet at the gibbet of Montfaucon. Meanwhile, armed men killed Coligny's lieutenants in houses close by. At the Louvre, Protestant nobles were roused early, disarmed, taken to a courtyard and killed by pikemen. Charles IX is said to have watched the butchery from a window. Henri de Navarre and of Henri de Condé, as princes of the blood, were spared but ordered to convert to the Catholic faith.

At dawn on 24 August, as the tocsin of the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois rang out, a mob ran into the streets of Paris intent on murdering Huguenots and looting. There is no evidence that this had been planned by the government, though words spoken in the heat of the moment by Guise may have given this impression. Many Parisians were only too willing to believe that Charles IX had decided to cleanse the kingdom of heresy. Though he ordered the killing to end, it continued for nearly a week. Jealousy as much as religious fanaticism may have fuelled the violence, aided by alcohol. The sudden springing to life of an old hawthorn bush in the Cemetery of the Innocents

³² Étienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, ed. D. Thickett (Geneva, 1966), p. 362 and p. 377 n. 6.

was widely interpreted as a sign of divine approval.³³ The massacre was not confined to Paris. In many provincial towns violence erupted as soon as news of the Parisian massacre reached them. In some, Huguenots were rounded up by the civic authorities and executed; in others mobs were to blame. Everywhere, it seems, the murderers imagined that they were carrying out the king's orders, yet Charles IX did apparently order his lieutenants to stop the carnage. On 26 August, however, he assumed responsibility for the deaths of Coligny and his lieutenants. Appearing before the Parlement of Paris, he explained that he had been obliged to unsheath 'the sword that God had placed in his hands to defend the good and exterminate the wicked'. He expressed regret that he had been forced to act thus in order to uphold his authority, adding that he hoped never to have to do so again.

What part did Henri d'Anjou play in the massacre? To answer this question, the historian is largely dependent on the reports of foreign diplomats, mainly Italian and Spanish, who may not have been correctly informed and were not above telling lies to please their masters. As the king's brother and a leading member of his council, Henri had certainly shared in the decision to wipe out the Huguenot leadership. His guard, which had been posted around the Admiral's residence following the attempt on his life, allowed Guise's execution squad to operate. Some of Henri's men shared in the killing. One is said to have strangled Téligny, Coligny's son-in-law, as he tried to escape over the roof tops. On 24 August Henri was meant to keep order in the capital with a force of 800 horse and 1,000 foot soldiers, but some chose to loot jewellery shops on the Pont Notre-Dame. One stole a clock valued at 500 *écus* which Henri bought off him for 10 *écus*. A rumour circulating at the time charged Henri with the rape of Coligny's daughter. This seems to have been put about by the Spanish ambassador in order to scupper Henri's chances of being elected to the Polish throne. At the same time, he was said to have saved the life of marshal de Cossé-Brissac at the request of his mistress, Madame de Châteauneuf.³⁴

On 29 August Henri wrote to Saint-Gouard, the French ambassador in Spain: 'I hope at this time that with God's help the king, my lord and brother, will alone be served and obeyed and that those who deceitfully had become his companions will henceforth no longer be able to oppose his commands and disturb his state.'³⁵ Subsequently, he told the Polish electors that the massacre

³³ Robert M. Kingdon, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Cambridge, MA, 1988) pp. 42, 46.

³⁴ Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III*, Vol. 2, p. 107.

³⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 636, p. 192.

in Paris had not spread to his duchy. Philip II, however, believed that Henri had played a major part in the massacre which the Catholic world hailed as a triumph. When Zuñiga was ordered to convey Philip's congratulations to Charles IX, he was also instructed to call on Henri to congratulate him on such a success, 'such congratulations being fully justified, as he has taken such a part in the council, discussion and execution. And by so doing the duke has shown to the world the love he bears to his brother. May he strive to carry on the good work with the assurance that he has in me another brother who loves and esteems him highly'.³⁶ While Philip singled out other members of the French court, none, not even the queen-mother, received such praise.

Members of Henri's entourage were among the most active executioners in the massacre. He is said to have ordered François de Cazillac-Sessac, one of his chamberlains and the lieutenant of his guard, to kill the Admiral at all cost. Louis de Bérenger-Le Guast, one of the gentlemen of his chamber, was sent to the rue de Béthisy specially to murder Charles de Baumanoir, marquis de Lavardin, while Henri went about the streets of Paris at daybreak to ensure that the slaughter of *huguenots de guerre* was going according to plan. Nicolas de Grimonville-Larchant, the captain of his guard, is said to have persuaded Catherine de' Medici to order the extermination of the Protestant family of Caumont to whom he was related by marriage in order to inherit its wealth. Coconat, the captain of Henri's Swiss troops, stood out during the massacre on account of his cruelty. Charles IX apparently turned against him after learning that he had killed 30 Huguenots by his own hand. Coconat occupied a house in the rue Saint-Honoré after driving away the lodger. Three Swiss officers serving under him also took part in the massacre. So there is plenty of evidence of a group linked to the duc d'Anjou among the killers.³⁷

The Polish Election

Catastrophic as it was, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and its aftermath did not dampen Catherine de' Medici's desire to obtain crowns for each of her children. She had succeeded in obtaining that of Navarre for her daughter, but Henri d'Anjou and François d'Alençon still had to be provided for. By flatly refusing to marry Queen Elizabeth I, Henri had effectively renounced the English throne; but that of Poland suddenly became an option. It was in 1572

³⁶ Arch. Nat., K. 1530.

³⁷ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seysell, 2001), pp. 84–6.

that Catherine began to take the idea seriously. Sigismund Augustus, the present king, was dying and had no son to succeed him. He did have a sister, however. Her name was Anna, but she was 48 years old and, by all accounts, no beauty. Two paths to the Polish throne lay open. The first was to marry Anna and succeed as heir presumptive; the other was election. For the Polish monarchy was elective. Catherine sought the opinion of Jean de Monluc, bishop of Valence, an experienced diplomat who had served in Venice and the Ottoman Empire. He thought it better for Henri to marry Anna than to face the risk of losing an election, but before any decision could be taken, the ground needed to be explored. This task was entrusted to Jean de Balagny, Monluc's natural son, who travelled to Poland disguised as a student.³⁸

Soon after 19 July 1572, when news of Sigismund-Augustus's death reached Paris, Catherine asked Monluc to travel to Poland in order to promote Henri's candidature. Monluc's Catholicism was far from extreme: in the 1560s he used to preach, dressed as a minister, and was thought to be sympathetic to Protestantism. Noted for his eloquence and powers of persuasion, he was well fitted for the delicate mission that lay before him. He left Paris on 17 August on a journey that was to prove unusually eventful. On reaching Saint-Dizier, he was dismayed to learn of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day. This was unlikely to endear him to the German Protestants he was bound to meet on his journey. In Lorraine, Monluc was imprisoned after he had been denounced to the authorities by a man seeking his bishopric. Catherine managed to secure his release, but more trouble awaited Monluc in Frankfurt, where a *reiter*, claiming that the French crown owed him money, seized his horses and baggage. He recovered them after payment of a ransom of 300 *écus*. Finally, as Monluc entered Brandenburg, he found it devastated by a recent outbreak of plague.³⁹

In the meantime, the Polish election got underway. Five candidates offered themselves: John III of Sweden, Ivan IV Tsar of Muscovy, the Archduke Ernest, son of the Emperor Maximilian II, and Henri duc d'Anjou. John III and Ivan IV, who had little to offer, received scant attention, but the candidature of Ernest created a furore. Though strongly backed by the nobles, he was rejected by the *schlachta* or gentry who remembered that Bohemia had lost its independence under the Habsburgs. They were also unwilling to antagonize the Ottoman Sultan, who threatened war if a Habsburg were elected. This left the way clear for Monluc to advance Henri's cause. On reaching Poland, he offered his condolences to Princess Anna and assured the nobles and prelates of the

³⁸ Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III*, Vol. 2, p. 188.

³⁹ Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III*, Vol. 2, pp. 190–92.

warm feelings Charles IX entertained towards them. Stressing the virtues shared by France and Poland, he urged the need for an alliance aimed at deterring Ivan IV from invading Poland. Monluc also affirmed that Henri intended to observe punctiliously the liberties and constitutions of his future subjects and promised that, if elected, he would persuade the Sultan to restore Moldavia to Poland. In anticipation of a diet summoned for 17 September 1572, the ambassador composed an elegant letter. Charles IX, he explained, was offering the Poles 'his very dear and well-beloved brother Henri, a most wise and very magnanimous duke, an excellent and most virtuous prince, on whom he depends as on his right arm and whom he leaves in charge of all matters of peace and war'. Henri, explained Monluc, was the perfect prince: tall, dignified and endowed with an excellent mind and an unrivalled prudence. Had he not given proof of his consummate ability by pacifying religious rivals? Nothing would be easier for such a prince, born and educated in a highly civilized nation, than to accept Polish uses and customs. Monluc also praised Henri's military virtues. He recalled his victories in 1569.⁴⁰

Henri seemed set to win the election when news of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre reached Poland. Overnight the atmosphere changed. Pictures showing lurid scenes of cruelty began to circulate. Some showed Charles IX and Henri egging on the murderers. Monluc was in despair. 'The ill wind that has come from France,' he wrote, 'has sunk the ship which we had brought to the harbour's entrance.'⁴¹ On 23 January 1573 he expressed his discouragement: 'Five hundred dogs, appointed to bite me, bark day and night and I have to answer everyone ... Please mention me to the queen so that she may think of some way of getting me out of here.'⁴² But Monluc was not beaten yet: he circulated an alternative account of the massacre which claimed that not more than 40 Huguenot nobles had been killed in Paris. By his action, he explained, Charles IX had foiled a Huguenot plot. The massacre sprang from the rivalry of the houses of Guise and Châtillon and its excesses were due to the Paris mob. Neither the king nor his brother was responsible for the slaughter. Though Monluc believed that Henri's chances of winning the election had suffered a serious setback, he did not give up hope. In speeches and writings, he claimed that the duke had done everything to avert the massacre and to help its victims. Protestant publicists were not convinced. They called Henri a 'Herod and tyrant'.⁴³ In March 1573

⁴⁰ Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III*, Vol. 2, pp. 196–8.

⁴¹ BnF, ms.Colbert 3381.

⁴² Champion., Vol. 2, p. 127n.

⁴³ Robert Sauzet (ed.), *Henri III et son temps* (Paris, 1992), pp. 70–71.

two more French diplomats – the abbé de L'Isle and Guy de Saint-Gelais de Lansac – arrived in Poland. They travelled all over the country describing Henri as 'easy of access, a good listener and a wise responder'.

On 5 April 1573 40,000 noblemen assembled in the field outside Warsaw to elect a new king. Grouped into palatinates, they were housed in tents erected on both banks of the Vistula linked by a wooden bridge. In the middle, enclosed by a wooden fence and a moat, was a spacious royal pavilion flanked by four smaller ones. As all the candidates were foreigners, their ambassadors needed to be heard. The first to speak was cardinal Commendone, who urged Poland to remain steadfastly Catholic and to banish Protestantism along with religious toleration. Rosenberg, representing Archduke Ernest, cast doubt on Henri's ability even to reach Poland. The German princes, he suggested, would bar his passage. He also denounced Henri's alliance with the Turks as unworthy of a Christian prince. If Ernest were elected, he said, he would allow the free passage of Hungarian wines into Poland. Monluc should have spoken next, but, pleading sickness, he secured a delay which enabled him to prepare a more effective reply to Rosenberg. When he addressed the Diet, he described Henri as a paragon while denigrating his rivals. Henri, he said, would not only confirm all Poland's laws and liberties, but also clear its debts. He would bring all his landed revenues from France, restore the University of Cracow, create a Baltic fleet and persuade the Sultan to hand over Moravia.⁴⁴

By 4 May, when the final count began, only three candidates remained: Henri d'Anjou, the Archduke Ernest and John III of Sweden. Four days later, the Grand chancellor opened the voting slips from each palatinate. Henri was the unanimous choice in 32 of them and had a majority in the remaining 22. On 5 May three orators were chosen to speak for each candidate, but Stanislas Karnowski, bishop of Włocławek, declared: 'The voice of the people is the voice of God. The people want their king to be Henri!' The crowd chanted '*Gallum! Gallum!*' On 11 May the minority conceded defeat in return for an undertaking that the successful candidate would only be confirmed after subscribing to articles limiting royal authority. A crowd of noblemen then burst into the royal tent shouting: 'We want Henri de Valois as our king!' As thousands of nobles outside took up the cry, the archbishop-primate cried out three times: 'We have as our king the very illustrious duke of Anjou!' But Jan Zborowski shouted: 'The archbishop has only named the king. Before he can be elected his ambassadors will need to sign in his name the terms which have been agreed.' This did not happen till 15 May, when Monluc and the other French diplomats signed terms

⁴⁴ Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III*, Vol. 2, pp. 200–202.

laid out in two documents: the Henrician Articles and the *Pacta Conventa*. The Henrician Articles provided for a Diet to be called every two years, prevented the king from naming his successor or marrying without its consent, restricted his authority over the *levée en masse*, limited his power over legislation, and bound him to accept a permanent council of 16 senators who were to reside at court. To safeguard the principle of toleration, the Confederation of Warsaw of 1573 was included in the Henrician Articles together with a rule which released the king's subjects from their oath of obedience if he should fail to honour the contract. The *Pacta Conventa* required Henri to conclude a political alliance and a trade agreement with France. He was to build a Baltic fleet at his own expense, close navigation to Russia through the port of Narva and furnish Gascon infantry in wartime. He was also to settle Sigismund-Augustus's debts, replenish the treasury, provide for the education of 100 Polish nobles in France and subsidize foreign scholars invited to Poland. The combined effect of both documents was to make the Polish monarch about as powerful as the Doge of Venice; in other words, little more than a figurehead. Soon after signing the *Pacta* and *Articuli*, Monluc wrote to Catherine de' Medici: 'Madam, I have fulfilled the promise that I made to you: to act so that you would see *Monseigneur* king of this kingdom.'⁴⁵ Catherine wept for joy on receiving the news. Several months, however, were to elapse before Henri was able to take up his throne. In the meantime, an embassy of Polish magnates came to France to salute their new king and obtain his written consent to the terms that had been accepted by his ambassadors.

⁴⁵ Champion, *La jeunesse de Henri III*, Vol. 2, p. 209.

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Chapter 4

The Siege of La Rochelle

The massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day dealt an almost fatal blow at the Huguenot movement. It wiped out its principal leaders, many of their followers and demoralized the rest, inducing some to abjure and others to go into exile abroad. But the massacre did not destroy the Huguenot movement which survived in the west and south of France where it controlled a number of fortified towns. An immediate consequence of the massacre was a renewal of civil war. Whatever excuse the crown might offer, the Huguenots could legitimately claim that the peace of Saint-Germain had been betrayed. As fighting began anew, the main area of military operations shifted south of the River Loire and the conflict took the form of sieges rather than pitched battles. This worked to the disadvantage of the crown which kept its artillery mainly in Paris or along the northern and eastern borders of the kingdom. Transporting it beyond the Loire proved difficult as communications were poor. The most important Huguenot stronghold was the Atlantic port of La Rochelle which had the advantage of being able to communicate directly with England and the Low Countries. Charles IX did not relish the prospect of besieging it. He entered into talks with the inhabitants, but they refused to submit or to admit Armand de Biron, the governor appointed by the king. At the same time, they prepared to defend their town.

By November 1572 it had become clear that La Rochelle would have to be reduced by force. On 4 November Henri wrote from Paris to the comte du Lude, governor of Poitou: 'since the Rochelais wish to be stubborn and to disobey his [the king's] wishes, and believing that the peace of the kingdom which I keenly desire, rests on the reduction of the said town and the punishment of such rebels, I have prayed the king, my said lord and brother, to put me in charge of the enterprise. I am ready to assemble all the necessary forces in order to go soon; and although the season is rough for such an enterprise, if it is pursued energetically, as it should be, we will overcome all difficulties.'¹ But Charles IX still hoped to reach an agreement with the Rochelais. François de La Noue was sent to them with an offer of concessions in return for their accepting Biron as

¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 664, p. 205.

governor, but his mission failed. By 4 December the king had granted Henri's request to lead an expedition against La Rochelle.

Gathering an army for the siege proved slow and difficult. Almost every part of the kingdom was made to contribute. A huge effort was put into marshalling the artillery. This comprised 42 cannon and great culverins, 354 personnel from the Paris Arsenal, 220 teamsters and 4,850 pioneers. Transporting them from Paris to La Rochelle proved arduous as they had to go overland for much of the way.² Supplying the army with food and drink also proved complicated. The merchants of Niort undertook to supply each day 30,000 loaves, 10,800 pints of wine and 20,000 lb. of beef.³ In January 1573 the total cost of preparations for the siege amounted to 534,000 *livres* of which only 287,000 had actually been paid with money raised from Parisian money-lenders or from the sale of offices.⁴

Pending Henri's coming, Biron organized a blockade on land and by sea. A stream of men and munitions flowed towards him throughout the winter, but siege operations were hampered by bad weather, mutinous troops and sorties by the Rochelais. Their town was protected on the landward side by a dry moat and by walls reinforced at intervals by bastions, the most famous being the *bastion de l'Évangile*. On the seaward side, the approaches to the harbour were commanded by forts.

Henri left Paris on 12 January 1573 at the head of a party that included his own familiars and the princes of the blood. They joined the royal army on 17 January at La Guerche in Touraine where the duc de Nevers and Albert de Gondi-Retz were waiting. Henri submitted to the authority of Nevers who assumed the role Tavannes had occupied in 1569. The army arrived outside La Rochelle on 11 February. By this time the town's investment on land had been completed but no approach trenches had been dug and the entrance to the harbour had only been partially closed by sinking ships.⁵ The shore batteries were also incomplete. Henri's army numbered about 25,000 men, not counting the crews of ships offshore. He soon completed the harbour's closure, reconnoitred the defences and consulted his council of officers. But the siege began inauspiciously. The high command was riddled with quarrels. Biron

² James B. Wood, *The King's Army: Warfare, soldiers and society during the Wars of Religion in France, 1562–1576* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 161, 173.

³ Arlette Jouanna, *La France du XVI^e siècle, 1483–1598* (Paris, 1996), p. 475.

⁴ Wood, *The King's Army*, p. 294.

⁵ P. Rambeaud, 'Le siège de La Rochelle (1572–1573), un exemple de poliorcétique à la fin du XVI^e siècle' in *Revue de Saintonge et d'Aunis*, 17 (1991), pp. 49–60. Nevers' and Anjou's reports on the siege are in BnF, ms.fr. 4765, fos. 15–53, 57–77 respectively. I am grateful to Dr. Alan James for these references.

resented the fact that Henri had given overall command to Nevers while he himself was left in charge of the artillery. The duc de Guise and his followers accused Nevers of favouring his friends when distributing commands. Henri, meanwhile, was being pressed by the king to take advice from Retz.

While his captains squabbled, Henri turned for companionship to the young noblemen who had flocked to La Rochelle from many parts of the kingdom in search of adventure and possible advancement. Some were members of his own household, but others belonged to the households of the king or Alençon. Several were of his generation: Saint-Luc, Caylus and La Vallette were almost 19, while Saint-Sulpice, Beauvais-Nangis and François d'O were in their early twenties. The tasks and dangers they shared outside La Rochelle brought them closer to Henri than ever before. Whereas at the Louvre some had been obliged to keep their distance, they were now free to rub shoulders with the duke. On 1 March, Jean de Saint-Sulpice wrote to his wife: 'Monsieur honours me greatly and talks to me privily about many things; more so than I had ever hoped for or imagined, and I do not forget my friends in these conversations.'⁶ Saint-Sulpice was the *surintendant* of Alençon's household and Henri doubtless hoped to get information about his brother's activities in return for his friendly chats. For many young noblemen the siege of La Rochelle was an introduction to the military life and to getting to know their social superiors. Henri, for his part, felt able for the first time to build up an entourage of his own choosing instead of having to accept companions picked by his mother. But they did not meet with universal approval. A Protestant pamphlet entitled *Le Reveil-Matin des français* described them as 'atheists, epicureans, blasphemers, sodomites'. Their youth and lack of military experience were blamed for the siege lasting so long.⁷

Henri sent regular news of the siege to the king. He mentioned injuries sustained by his friends, including Le Guast who had been wounded during an assault on the *bastion de l'Évangile*.⁸ Henri himself showed bravery and determination. Each morning at dawn – sometimes as early as 4 a.m. – he would hold a meeting of his council of war. No matter, however small, escaped his attention. He determined the rotation of guard duty and increased the number of trench inspections by day and at night. He should have taken more care of

⁶ Edmond Cabié (ed.), *Guerres de religion dans le Sud-Ouest et principalement dans le Quercy, d'après les papiers des seigneurs de Saint-Sulpice de 1566 à 1590* (Albi, 1906), p. 206.

⁷ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Scyssel, 2000), pp. 129–35.

⁸ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, pp. 220, 233, 255, 267, 269; BnF, ms.fr. 15557, fol. 200 verso.

himself, however. On 14 June as he stood outside one of the gates of La Rochelle talking to one of the defenders, an arquebusier took a potshot at him and might have killed him if his groom, Hubert de la Garde, sieur de Vins, had not thrown himself in the bullet's path. Even so one bullet hit the duke's shirt collar, while another grazed his hand. Many members of his entourage were killed or wounded during the siege, while hunger, cold or disease also took their toll. The duc d'Aumale died on 3 March. Retz was shot in the kidneys. An assault on 7 April was especially costly: about 20 nobles were wounded that day. On 8 March Chavigny wrote to the marquis de Villars: 'many others have been wounded or killed and there will be more if this wretched town remains stubborn.'⁹

On 26 February work began on trenches leading to the town's moat and on gun batteries, but it was hampered by lack of materials, bad weather, heavy casualties among the pioneers and frequent sorties from the town. On 20 April the trenches finally reached the counterscarp and moat near the *bastion de l'Évangile*, which Henri chose as his point of attack. But, as work progressed, new hazards were discovered, notably pillboxes concealed in the moat from which sharpshooters could fire on troops attacking the wall. New gun batteries capable of pounding the bastion were installed on the moat's shoulder. In the meantime, the Rochelais strengthened their inner defences.¹⁰ Between February and June 1573 Henri launched eight major assaults on La Rochelle. The first, on 7 April, was preceded by a furious bombardment. The *bastion de l'Évangile* was badly damaged as well as sections of the curtain wall. About 200 nobles armed with cuirasses and small shields were given the task of scaling a breach, but many were roasted alive as incendiary devices thrown by the defenders rained down on them. After two hours, the assault was called off. It had achieved only a toehold at the base of the bastion. Henri wanted to renew it next day, but, finding that he had only 100 cannon balls left, he had to fetch more from the fleet. On 8 April the Rochelais laid down a smokescreen so thick that 'you would have thought it was a pit of Hell'. Another royal assault two days later was thrown back. Henri blamed his men for this. They 'began to frighten themselves and be greatly vexed, and even openly to disband so that I expected in the end to find myself someday left all alone'. Work on the approaches almost reached a standstill as only 400 pioneers remained of the several hundred at the start of the siege. On 14 April a mine exploded, bringing down part of the bastion. Tons of rock and earth fell on Henri's troops, causing numerous casualties. Before a new assault could be launched, troops and guns had to be diverted to counter

⁹ BnF, ms.fr. 3257, fol. 32.

¹⁰ Wood, *The King's Army*, pp. 255–8.

a new threat. On 19 April a Huguenot relief fleet, commanded by the comte de Montgomery, arrived off La Rochelle, but soon withdrew.

According to an English observer, supplies in Henri's camp soon ran out and dysentery became rife. Cavriana reported that troops were dying in large numbers. Filthy and in rags, many were no longer obeying orders. In May the camp's suppliers raised their fee by 20 per cent. *Gendarmes*, who could no longer feed their horses, were sent home. Only 200 pioneers were left and attempts to recruit more failed. The French infantry units fell to below half strength. Survivors refused to man the trenches and some fled whenever the enemy launched a sortie. A lack of powder virtually silenced the artillery. Yet Henri still hoped to capture the bastion. On 23 May, he received 6,000 Swiss reinforcements but they were armed only with pikes. In the confusion that attended their coming, the Rochelais attacked the trenches, spiking four guns and capturing a number of flags. On 30 May, after another failed assault, Henri disbanded 60 companies of infantry. He wrote to the king: 'my anger is boundless that the assault should have failed on account of the cowardice [*méchanceté de cœur*] of the soldiers, for the captains did well ... After seeing what I saw that day, I am almost ashamed to be French. If you had seen that, you too would have been angry.'¹¹ Later that day, panic swept through Henri's camp for no apparent reason. His tent was trampled upon and he described himself as half-dead. Nevers was too exhausted to leave his quarters. Noblemen were ordered to man the trenches in the absence of soldiers. The Rochelais taunted the besiegers by displaying flags they had captured or by playing at cards or dice. Henri tried to restore the army's morale during the next few days, but soon came to realize that this was hopeless. An Englishman reported that only 2,000 royal troops were left. Two more assaults failed to breach La Rochelle's inner defences. In a final report to the king, written in July, Henri blamed his defeat on insufficient artillery, manpower and food: 'the artillery equipment limped in piece by piece and at a snail's pace,' he wrote, 'and I lacked good soldiers, so that I could not totally invest the city or have the means to prepare three batteries and three breaches ... As for powder, I was never able to learn for certain how much there really was. Besides, it came only in such small amounts that at times I ran out completely, and when I had powder, I lacked cannon-balls. All this did I endure.'¹²

On 29 May Henri learnt that he had been elected as King of Poland.¹³ This gave him an excuse to bring the siege to an honourable conclusion. A truce was

¹¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 784, p. 264.

¹² BnF, ms.fr. 4765, f. 75v-77r.

¹³ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, p. 137.

arranged, then peace: under the Edict of Boulogne Protestant worship was to be allowed in the town, but only in private houses. Attendance at Protestant weddings or baptisms was to be limited to 10 people.¹⁴ Marshal Biron made a brief ceremonial entry into La Rochelle. Meanwhile, Henri's camp was broken up. As the troops were disbanded, the artillery was removed to Paris and to various provincial depots. Henri returned to Paris. He left by galley 'to avoid the murmuring and mutiny of the soldiers, for that they were unpaid' to prepare the defence of his conduct of operations before the royal council. His entourage included most of the leading figures from the siege, except Biron. They included Nevers and Retz, who had reputations to preserve and careers to protect. The siege of La Rochelle has been rightly described as 'the most important and decisive military episode of the entire period of the early wars of religion'.¹⁵ Royal losses were out of all proportion to the results obtained. Brantôme estimated them at 22,000. Wood's 'very conservative guess' is that the army suffered at least 6,000 combat casualties, a figure which sickness and desertion would surely have doubled. It seems that only 7,400 royal troops survived; in other words, half the original strength. The ratio of casualties was especially high among the officers. A list kept by Filippo Strozzi, colonel-general of the infantry, contained the names of 266 officers killed. Among captains the casualty rate was 73 per cent. Even allowing for France's relatively buoyant population, it would have been difficult for the crown rapidly to make up such losses with adequately trained officers.¹⁶ The siege also emptied the kingdom of guns and munitions faster than they could be stockpiled. The royal treasury faced a deficit of 15.3 million *livres*.¹⁷

Contemporary observers were shocked by the contrast between the splendid army that had laid siege to La Rochelle and the much diminished and disorganized rabble that was left in July. Denis G  n  roux, a notary from Poitou, commented in his diary: 'the said army left in great confusion and badly led after having been the finest, most splendid, and well-led and equipped force that had ever been seen.'¹⁸ The haste with which Henri had come to terms with the defenders of La Rochelle stood in sharp contrast to the prestige he had acquired by his victories at Jarnac and Moncontour. The siege was seen by many as a harbinger of dreadful

¹⁴ N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 360–61.

¹⁵ Wood, *The King's Army*, p. 246.

¹⁶ Wood, *The King's Army*, pp. 270–71.

¹⁷ Wood, *The King's Army*, pp. 295–300.

¹⁸ B. Le Dain, *Journal historique de Denis G  n  roux notaire    Parthenay (1567–1576)* (Niort, 1865), p. 107.

misfortunes. For Claude Haton the year 1573 marked a downward turning point in the kingdom's fortunes. He viewed Henri's election as king of Poland as a disaster: it had revived the fortunes of the Huguenots, renewed France's civil war, drained her finances, emasculated the Catholics, and hastened the death of Charles IX.¹⁹ The long duration of the siege and its failure were ascribed less to the fierce resistance of the defenders than to the duplicity of Henri's entourage. He was accused of weakness by failing to impose discipline on his aids.

On 2 August Henri met his brother, Charles IX at the château of Madrid near Paris and was given leave to submit a report on the siege. This was written by Nevers, who presumably drew on the day-to-day diary he had kept during that operation. As the text was far too long, Henri delivered a shortened version on 6 August. It has been described as providing 'an object lesson in anti-heroics with half a finger pointing towards the royal advisers who had contemplated the enterprise in the first place'.²⁰ The campaign had been badly timed, poorly prepared and under-resourced. There had been no evaluation of La Rochelle's defensive capabilities beforehand. When Henri had left to join the army, he had been told that everything was in place for the siege, but this had turned out to be untrue. He had every reason to feel bitter. 'I won't tell you how upset and angry I was to see things going so badly'. Having set up a landward blockade, he was ashamed when the townspeople were relieved from the sea. When they recaptured a trench that had fallen to his men, he felt deeply ashamed of the lack of courage shown by his troops. He repeatedly blamed collective responsibility and systemic failure for what had happened. His own military ordinances of 15 February 1573 had been models of their kind, but the reality had been different. His bombardment of La Rochelle on 7 April had backfired disastrously. As he sought to draw lessons from the fiasco, Henri laid out a plan of reform for the kingdom. In addition to proposals independently submitted by Retz and Nevers concerning judicial and military matters, Henri considered reform of the church, finance, the system of honours and rewards and monetary matters. It has been described as 'the longest, most comprehensive and most searching review of the way in which the kingdom was run since the Ordinances of Orléans (1560) and the first of the kind to emerge from the interstices of the royal family itself'.²¹ Its overall theme was that the renewal of the kingdom depended on the crown reasserting its powers of favour and reward to ensure that notables lived up to

¹⁹ *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, ed. Laurent Bourquin (Paris, 2003), Vol. 3, pp. 28.

²⁰ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and reform in the French kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), p. 18.

²¹ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 20.

their name. Henri proposed a radical overhaul of ecclesiastical appointments. As with the church, he stressed the need to encourage a sense of discipline by reforming the distribution of honours and favour. The king needed to remember that he only disposed of about one million *livres* for this purpose. Regarding the judicial administration, Henri called for more emphasis on criminal justice than on civil suits. A theme running through the memorandum was the idea that reforming justice would promote peace. Henri also considered loyalty. Drawing on the lessons of antiquity, he showed that the Romans were well served because they rewarded dutiful service to the fatherland. He deplored the current practice of rewarding young men who had achieved nothing. Turning to money matters, he said that, unless the royal finances were reformed, the king would never achieve anything in peace or war. He listed a number of measures aimed at improving revenue collection and balancing the budget. The longest section of the memorandum concerned military matters and set out to make the existing military ordinances more effective. Henri supported a gradual consolidation of arsenals and a return to an edict of 1552 which had set up a force of military suppliers.

Henri's memorandum was read out to the council over several days from 6 August to 14 August. Individual councillors were given an article to take away and with a view to producing a more detailed report. Pomponne de Béllièvre, in his report, argued that the enforcement of existing laws was more important than enacting new ones. He urged the king to dispatch notables around the kingdom to investigate the crown's local office-holders. Those who were found to be incapable or unworthy should be suspended for a year and given an opportunity to amend their ways. It is possible that the Assembly of Notables held at Compiègne in the autumn of 1573 was a consequence of Henri's memorandum, but its proceedings are largely unknown and were soon overtaken by events at court, particularly negotiations for Henri's departure to Poland and a major conspiracy in February 1574.²²

The Polish Embassy

On 19 August 1573 a Polish embassy, comprising 12 Catholics and Protestants, a suite of 250 noblemen and a host of servants, arrived in Paris. After entering by the Porte Saint-Martin, they encountered a number of temporary triumphal arches bearing inscriptions in their honour before taking up their lodging on the

²² Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, pp. 28–9.

left bank of the Seine. Parisians made fun of their long beards, bonnets and furs. At court, however, a more respectful atmosphere prevailed. The French nobles were amazed by the Poles' mastery of Latin and of other languages. A few could even speak French whereas their hosts could only reply with signs. After resting for two days, the ambassadors paid their respects to Charles IX, Catherine de' Medici and Queen Elizabeth at the Louvre. On Saturday 22 August, they called on Henri at the Hôtel d'Anjou. The bishop of Poznan congratulated him on his election to the Polish throne, but reminded him that he still needed to confirm the pacts and articles that had been signed in his name. He urged Henri to come to Poland without delay as he was needed to defend it from a possible attack by the Tsar of Muscovy. Unaccustomed to speaking Latin, Henri spoke only briefly, leaving Hurault de Cheverny to give a fuller reply. The ambassadors then retired after kissing his right hand.



Figure 4.1 Portrait of Henry duc d'Anjou about 1571 (Oil on panel) French school, sixteenth century. Musée Condé, Chantilly.

Source: Bridgeman Art Library.

On 24 August the Poles returned to the Hôtel d'Anjou. The bishop of Poznan explained the role and duties of a king of Poland. 'You will be powerless to do evil,' he said, 'but all powerful to do good.' Secretary Brûlart then read out the terms which Henri was expected to accept. Replying in French, he objected to the clause that debarred him from employing French servants. Kings of France, he explained, had traditionally employed servants of all nations. After a brief discussion, the matter was deferred till 29 August. This meeting revealed sharp differences among the Poles themselves on the question of religious freedom. Bishop Konarski, who headed their delegation, urged Henri not to accept the Confederation of Warsaw of 28 January 1573 which granted toleration to all denominations. Henri replied that he could not accept conditions that had not been endorsed by all his Polish subjects. Whereupon Jan Zborowski, the spokesman for the non-Catholics, exclaimed: '*Jurabis aut non regnabis!*' (Swear the oath or you will not rule!). Several more meetings were held between 2 and 13 September, mainly at the Hôtel d'Anjou.²³ Two articles were particularly repugnant to Henri: the obligation to hand over his private revenues to the Polish Republic and a clause releasing his subjects from their obedience if he broke any condition attached to his election. Regarding his marriage to Anna, Sigismund-Augustus's sister, Henri refused to commit himself at this stage. Members of his entourage felt that it was not in his best interest to leave France just as Charles IX's health seemed so precarious. They feared that if the king were to die while Henri was abroad, Alençon would try to seize the throne. Catherine de' Medici was particularly suspicious of René de Villequier, seen as the companion Henri 'loved the most'. She and the king accused him of trying to dissuade Henri from accepting the Polish terms. The Venetian ambassador reported that Charles had even tried to murder Villequier with his own hands!²⁴

On 9 September, however, Henri subscribed to the *Pacta* and *Articuli* and that evening threw a magnificent banquet at the Hôtel d'Anjou. Next day Charles IX formally recognized Henri as his heir to the throne and went to the cathedral of Notre-Dame where Henri solemnly swore to honour the terms offered him by the Poles. Three days later another ceremony took place, this time in the great hall of the Palais de Justice before a large crowd of ambassadors, royal councillors and magistrates of the Parlement. Charles IX sat on a canopied stage alongside the new king of Poland, the two queens, the duc d'Alençon and Henri de Navarre. As silver trumpets played a fanfare, the Polish ambassadors entered

²³ For the official account of these talks see the *Revue retrospective*, Vol. IV (1834), p. 49. It is taken from BnF Coll. Dupuy, ms. 158.

²⁴ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 139–40.

bearing a casket containing the election decree. This document, now among the archives of the Quai d'Orsay, is a beautifully written parchment to which about 100 seals of the members of the Polish Diet are attached by silk ribbons, red, white and green. After the casket had been placed on a table covered with a cloth of red velvet, Bishop Konarski presented the decree to Charles IX; then, facing Henri, proclaimed him king of Poland. The decree was read out and Henri thanked God for the honour that had been bestowed upon him. The Chancellor, Cheverny, then spoke, praising him for leaving his fatherland and family in order to bring happiness to the Polish people. A *Te Deum* in the royal chapel followed, whereupon Charles IX kissed Henri, and each Polish ambassador kissed his hand in turn. The casket containing the election decree was then carried in procession to the Sainte-Chapelle for Vespers and finally to the Hôtel d'Anjou.



Figure 4.2 Court fête in Paris in 1573 to honour the Polish ambassadors in the presence of Catherine de' Medici and Henry III (tapestry) after Francois Quesnel (1543–1619). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library [XIR 473390].

On 14 September Henri, wearing a suit of armour, made his entry into Paris as king of Poland. After inspecting troops outside the convent of the Dames de Saint-Antoine, he rode through the streets from the Porte Saint-Martin to Notre-Dame for another *Te Deum*. That evening, Catherine de' Medici held a reception at the palace of the Tuileries. After dinner, 16 young ladies of the court, each representing a French province, performed a ballet devised by Balthasar de Beaujoyeux. They entered the hall seated on a large rock and completed a full circle before descending from it to perform their ballet to music played by 30 violins. Blending to perfection their steps and figures, they evoked peace and tranquillity.²⁵ A ball followed that lasted all night. Next day, the mayor and *échevins* of Paris presented Henri with a silver chariot bearing a likeness of Mars, pulled by two white horses. Now that the formalities were over, the way was clear for him to take up his throne. On 18 September he wrote to Stanislas Karnowski, bishop of Włocawek, telling him that he was sending Nicolas d'Angennes, seigneur de Rambouillet, to Poland as ambassador.²⁶ He was given a letter addressed to the nobles and dignitaries of Poland in which Henri thanked them for having elected him and promised to govern with their advice, to respect their rights and privileges, and to defend Poland against any aggressor.²⁷

Henri's election as king of Poland offered him the chance to overhaul his household completely. He wanted his companions to be men of his own choosing and, as far as possible, to be rid of those picked for him by his mother. No less than seven gentlemen of the chamber in the new household were young men who had taken part in the siege of La Rochelle. Most belonged to well-known families. Religion seems not to have concerned Henri for two of his new companions (Renty and La Huguerye) were Protestants; age was far more important to him. Most of his new companions were aged between 18 and 24 years. The oldest were René and Claude de Villequier, who were about 40, Alamanni and Larchant. Henri's privy councillors, however, were more mature: Nevers was 34, Retz 51, Rambouillet 43, and Bellièvre and Pibrac, both 44. Several members of the new household had served briefly in the king's household or that of Alençon. They evidently believed that Henri offered them a better chance of advancement.²⁸

Before leaving Paris members of Henri's suite settled their debts and arranged for the payment of their landed revenues to proxies. Henri laid down minute

²⁵ Frances A. Yates, *The Valois Tapestries*, 2nd edn (London, 1975), pp. 67–72; Margaret M. McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 111–14.

²⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 862, p. 302.

²⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 863, pp. 302–3.

²⁸ Olivier Poncet, *Pomponne de Bellièvre (1529–1607) Un homme d'état au temps des guerres de religion* (Paris, 1998), p. 69.

regulations regarding the etiquette they were to observe. He expected them to dress sumptuously and he ordered pages to wear his yellow and green livery. A detailed list was drawn up of the plate, tapestries, furniture and gifts that were to be carried to Poland. Henri also arranged for pensions to be paid to his travelling companions and to servants left behind in France. The total amounted to the colossal sum of 489,250 *livres*, the lion's share (46 per cent) going to Albert de Gondi-Retz. Only a few privileged persons were paid any travelling expenses. All had to pay for their own silk cloth and jewels and some borrowed large sums for this purpose. Henri openly refused to be accompanied by any member of the house of Montmorency thereby affirming his commitment to the Catholic faith, yet Huguenots were not formally excluded from his party.²⁹ Condé was meant to join it but backed out at the last minute on account of a fever he had allegedly contracted. Henri also arranged for Cheverny to keep him regularly informed of events in France during his absence. Halts on the journey had been arranged by Gaspard de Schomberg who had visited all the German princes concerned. Louis de Lansac proffered last minute advice to Henri, doubtless at Catherine's prompting, on how he should behave in Poland.³⁰ The suite that he took to Poland was large. His household comprised five *grands officiers*, one physician, one *abbé*, one almoner, five chaplains, 36 chamberlains and gentlemen of the chamber, a vanguard of 30 noblemen, a troop of 800 cavalry and a rearguard 100 strong. There were more than 1,500 horses. The historian, De Thou, reckoned that 'six hundred young Frenchmen, all of them noblemen and very brave' tagged on.³¹ A passport issued on 27 August by the Imperial diet was for 400 to 500 horsemen to be followed after two days by another 800. There were also numerous waggons loaded with linen, carpets and precious objects including silver plate worth 35,205 *livres* and jewellery estimated at 50,000 *livres*.³²

Henri was in no hurry to leave France. He even asked Cheverny to find pretexts for delaying his departure till March 1574. He remained at Fontainebleau after the king had left for the court of Lorraine. He caught up with the king at Villers-Côtterets on 10 October. Charles wanted to accompany Henri to Nancy but was forced to take to his bed at Vitry-en-Perthois, where he was joined by his mother and two brothers. It was to be their last meeting together. Writing to Mandelot on 15 November, Henri made no secret of his anguish at leaving his

²⁹ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, p. 141.

³⁰ Marquis de Noailles, *Henri de Valois et la Pologne en 1572* (Paris, 1867), Vol. 3, p. 519.

³¹ Jacques-Auguste de Thou, *Histoire universelle depuis 1543 jusqu'en 1607* (London, 1734), Vol. VII, p. 27.

³² Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 143–6.

family.³³ At Nancy, he and his mother were well received by Charles III duke of Lorraine. It was here, during festivities laid on by the duke, that Henri first saw Louise de Vaudémont whom he was eventually to marry. But he was still madly in love with Marie de Clèves, the wife of the prince of Condé.³⁴ After leaving Nancy, on 25 November, Henri and his mother travelled to Blamont, a small town on the border of the Holy Roman Empire where they were joined by a delegation of German princes and also by Louis of Nassau and Christopher, son of the Elector Palatine. They discussed a possible alliance in support of the Dutch rebels against Spain. On 2 December 1573 Catherine and Henri took a tearful leave of each other.

³³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 901, p. 315.

³⁴ Jacqueline Boucher, *Société et mentalités autour de Henri III* (Paris, 2007), pp. 93–6.

Chapter 5

King of Poland

Henri entered the Holy Roman Empire on 4 December. His suite numbered around 1,200 persons and included numerous carts carrying luggage, furnishings and silver.¹ Among his companions were the duc de Nevers, his chief councillor; de Selve, bishop of Saint-Flour, his former tutor; Marc Miron, his physician, the abbés Gilles de Noailles and Gadagne, Guy Du Faur de Pibrac, René de Villequier, Louis Bérenger, sieur de Guast, and Pomponne de Bellièvre.² To make sure the way ahead was clear, Henri sent Gaspard de Schomberg, a Saxon by birth who had taken French nationality. The main threat consisted of *reiters* who were still owed money by the French crown for services in the third religious war. For this reason Henri took with him 150,000 ducats for payment to John Casimir, who had been the chief supplier of German mercenaries. He needed to tread carefully for news of the massacre of St. Bartholomew had caused outrage among the German Protestants, his own role in that event not being above suspicion. Everyone knew that he had fought the Huguenots in the third religious war and had since led the Catholic party in France.

Henri crossed Germany more or less directly from Speyer in the west to Frankfurt on Oder in the east. One of his first halts was Heidelberg, capital of the Palatinate, where on 12 December he met the Elector, Frederick the Pious, who deplored the damage done to the reputation of the kings of France among the German Protestant princes by the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. In his opinion, only by conceding religious freedom would a lasting peace be secured in France, but Henri disagreed. He cast doubt on the loyalty of the Huguenots. Frederick seems not to have taken offence, for he acclaimed Henri's election to the Polish throne as a sign of divine favour. From Heidelberg, Henri travelled to Mainz, then Frankfurt where many Dutch refugees had settled. Some booed him and d'Entragues nearly caused a riot by charging them on his horse.³ On 23 December Henri wrote to Alençon from Steinau: 'You have heard about

¹ Pierre Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne* (Paris, 1943), Vol. 1, p. 7.

² Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 10–11.

³ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, p. 25.

Bussy ... Thank God, he is ... safe after facing much danger'.⁴ Unable to find accommodation in Frankfurt, Bussy had gone to a village where 'acting like a Frenchman' he had tried to seduce his hostess. The villagers had beaten him up and he might have been killed if the local count had not imprisoned him for his own protection. Henri's secretary had since secured his release.⁵ Christmas was spent at Fulda where the Jesuits had a college. By confessing his sins, receiving communion and attending all their services, Henri demonstrated his loyalty to the Catholic faith, but discretion was required. Wilhelm IV, Landgrave of Hesse, who hated the Jesuits, also raised the subject of the massacre in Paris. When Henri tried to justify it by citing Machiavelli, Wilhelm retorted that the Florentine was no Christian. Yet, the Landgrave seems also to have been seduced by Henri, for he declared: 'I do not know your Majesty's brothers, but if they are as wise as you are, the queen your mother must be the happiest woman on earth!' From Hesse, Henri travelled to Eisenach where 500 cavalry waited to escort him into Saxony. Duke Augustus, however, preferred to have his son-in-law greet him. He wanted Henri to visit Wittenberg, but he declined and went to Torgau instead. On 13 January, at Delitzsch, he wrote to Rambouillet about the apartment that awaited him in the palace at Cracow. He wanted to be sure that he would be able to enter and leave it without being seen. 'You know,' he explained, 'how the queen, my mother, loves this; I am the same, but do it skilfully so that no one will know the reason'.⁶ At the same time, he wrote to Charles IX, urging him to be his own master and not to allow favours or offices to be distributed by others. By doing so he would avert the creation of clientèles or parties. 'This,' he wrote, 'has always been the advice given to you by the queen your mother wherein lies the truth'.⁷

Cracow

On 15 January 1574 Henri resumed his journey to Poland. At Luckau in Brandenburg, 1,500 cavalry saluted him in the Emperor's name. On 19 January, after receiving at Frankfurt-on-Oder a safe-conduct and an escort of 600 cavalry from the Elector, he entered Poland where an amazing reception awaited him. No less than 1,500 horsemen, dressed in various national costumes – Turkish, Hungarian, Italian and Polish – met him at Miedzyrzecz. Equally varied were

⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 917, p. 323.

⁵ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seysssel, 2000), p. 149.

⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 921, p. 325.

⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 920, pp. 324–5.

the weapons they carried. Shouts of joy and trumpet fanfares filled the air. Stanislas Karnkowski, bishop of Wlocawek, acclaimed Henri as the saviour of the Polish nation. At Poznan, the entire population turned out to greet him. Writing to Charles IX on 30 January, he expressed his satisfaction: 'So far I have only been to Poznan where I am now. It is a fine town with handsome houses. An infinite number of brave nobles, excellently appointed, seem well-inclined towards me, and they have told me that their number (four thousand) is not to be compared to that which awaits me in Cracow.'⁸ There was less enthusiasm, however, among Henri's companions. They were shocked by some Polish manners, disliked the harsh weather and complained of the beds being too hard. On 11 February, Henri reached Czestochowa, already a pilgrimage centre dedicated to the Black Virgin. After being entertained in a number of castles, Henri spent a few days at the home of Jan Firlej, Grand-Marshal of the Crown, who was a Calvinist. He could not enter Cracow until the funeral of Sigismund-Augustus, the late king, had taken place. On 18 February he was met outside Cracow by 30,000 Polish nobles brandishing their swords. After inspecting them, Henri dismounted and saluted members of the Senate, each of whom kissed his hand. The bishop of Plock made a speech to which Pibrac replied. At dusk, the king entered Cracow by torchlight. Riding a white horse, he passed through a gateway decorated with the arms of Poland and replicas of large white eagles. He wore a suit of velvet lined with fur and with silver embroidery. His black velvet bonnet was adorned with emeralds and he wore a large diamond on his forehead. After dismounting, Henri joined a procession under a canopy borne by eight senators. He was preceded by the aldermen of Cracow and followed by prelates. As the royal cortège slowly made its way up the hill to the castle of Wawel, white eagles perched on triumphal arches bowed their heads in submission. Above the castle gateway a golden eagle flapped its wings. To complete the day's celebrations, a *Te Deum* was sung in the cathedral of St. Stanislas. Before retiring, Henri called on Princess Anna to pay his respects, and dined with the senators. On 20 February he received the papal nuncio and foreign ambassadors.

The king-elect was expected to establish close relations with the nobility. For this reason, Lansac advised him to share his table at dinner with the ambassadors, bishops and leading nobles. Even so, Henri's relations with the Poles never became close. He gradually withdrew into the circle of his French friends, among whom was Bellegarde, an old Gascon soldier who bore the title of colonel-general of hypothetical Gascon troops who might be called upon to fight the Muscovites. He had followed Henri since the siege of La Rochelle after

⁸ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 928, pp. 328–9.

a career spent mostly in Italy. In 1562 he had joined Retz's clientèle. During his first weeks in Poland, Henri upset his entourage by favouring Bellegarde. Nevers was so put out that he eventually left Cracow giving the climate as his excuse. Another who resented Bellegarde's presence was Villequier. Catherine de' Medici also was upset to hear of the favours Bellegarde was receiving from Henri. Cheverny was asked to convey her displeasure to him.⁹

Even at this late hour the Poles were still arguing as to whether or not to crown Henri. Protestant members of the Diet were alarmed when an intercepted letter from Rome claimed that he had no intention of honouring the promises he had made to the Polish ambassadors in Paris. They feared that, once crowned, Henri would expel all non-Catholics from Poland. Another letter reminded them that French monarchs had always ruled as they pleased, regardless of any laws. After a lengthy debate, the Diet asked the Senate to require the ambassadors who had gone to Paris to report in detail on their mission. A majority of senators, however, wanted the coronation to go ahead regardless. Henri threatened to fast pending a decision while taking the wise precaution of appearing before the Senate and thanking its members for electing him. Replying, the bishop of Plock explained that the Senate still wanted to discuss the coronation. Henri was still unsure of the outcome as he made his way back to the Wawel. Meanwhile, several dignitaries arrived bearing gifts. One was the Palatine of Kiev who offered Henri five camels, and another the Palatine of Russia who brought him some Tartar slaves.¹⁰

On 20 February, members of the Diet came to salute Henri, albeit with reservations. Later that day, it was the turn of ambassadors. The coronation was due to take place next day, but the Senate was still arguing about the oath to be sworn by Henri during the ceremony. Was it to be the most recent one which severely restricted royal authority or the simpler one traditionally taken by Polish kings? Henri naturally favoured the latter. The matter was still undecided on 21 February when the coronation took place. Henri arrived at the cathedral of St. Stanislas accompanied by the papal nuncio and numerous ambassadors. As these occupied places in the choir, the bishops of Cracow and Transylvania led Henri to the altar where prayers were recited over him. As 'Sigismund', the great bell, began to toll, Henri was led to his throne and reminded by a bishop of his duties towards God, the church and the Christian faith. Henri knelt as choirs sang *Te rogamus audi nos* (*We beg you, hear our prayers*). Then came the oath. As Henri took it, Jan Firlej and two other Protestants stepped forward. A major disturbance was narrowly averted, however, by the Grand marshal who

⁹ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 150–53.

¹⁰ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 80–82.

assured Henri that he needed only to add the phrase '*quod rex conservaret pacem et tranquillitatem inter dissidentes de religione*' to restore order (*the king shall keep the peace among religious dissidents*). He replied: '*Conservare curabo*' (*I shall do so*). This did the trick. All parties, including Firlej, declared themselves satisfied. The marshal then shouted: 'Senators and deputies, the king has taken the oath. Do you want him to be crowned?' 'Has he taken the new oath?' asked members of the Diet. 'He has,' replied Firlej. Whereupon Catholics and Protestants shouted: 'Let him be crowned! That is our wish. *Vivat Rex!* (*Long live the king!*)' The coronation could now proceed without further disturbance. After bestowing his blessing on the king, Archbishop Uchanski anointed him with a sacred balm. Then, after handing him the sword of state, he placed Poland's ancient crown on his head and handed him the orb and sceptre. Mass followed during which Henri placed the crown on the altar and received communion. He then returned to the throne wearing the crown and holding the orb in one hand and sceptre in the other. The senators, followed by members of the Diet, came forward and swore allegiance.¹¹

About 2 p.m. Henri returned to the Wawel for a banquet in a hall with walls covered with French tapestries. He sat alone at a small table set between two enormous ones. On the right, sat the papal nuncio and other foreign envoys and, on the left, the high nobles and bishops. The banquet, which lasted six hours, was marred, as usual, by disputes over precedence among the guests. The ambassador of Ferrara refused to surrender his seat to the ambassador of Brandenburg. On the 22 February Henri emerged from the Wawel with a small cavalry escort and a large number of nobles, all on horseback. Still wearing his coronation regalia, he sat on a grandstand erected in Cracow's spacious main square and received the homage of the inhabitants. He threw fistfuls of coins among them which he could ill afford given the state of his treasury. The Castellan of Cracow gave him its two gold keys. Afterwards the king attended another banquet given this time by André Zborowski to celebrate his marriage.

Troubles in France

Henri's departure to Poland left the way clear for his younger brother, François d'Alençon, to assert himself. On 25 January 1574 Charles IX promised to appoint him as lieutenant-general of the kingdom in place of Henri, but this greatly annoyed the Guises who disliked Alençon's friendship with marshal François de Montmorency. They cooked up a plot to discredit both men. Henri

¹¹ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 84–8.

de Guise attacked the sieur de Ventabren, one of Alençon's men, in the Louvre after accusing him of being an assassin hired by Montmorency to kill him. Both parties denied the charge, but Montmorency had to leave the court and Charles IX broke his promise to Alençon by appointing Charles III, duke of Lorraine, as lieutenant-general of the kingdom. Catherine de' Medici is said to have inspired this appointment as she feared that Alençon might try to seize the throne in the event of Charles IX dying during Henri's absence.

On 27 February 1574 the court fled in confusion from Saint-Germain-en-Laye to the fortress of Vincennes after Protestant troops had been seen in the château's vicinity. Their aim was allegedly to set free the prince of Condé and Henri of Navarre who had been held at court since the massacre of St. Bartholomew. The plot, however, misfired. Its leader, the sieur de Guित्रy, asserted that it had been aimed at the Guises, not the crown. This was confirmed by Alençon. The chancellor, Birague, wanted Condé and Navarre to be executed as traitors, but Charles IX refused. Instead, they were placed under heavy guard and made to sign an oath of allegiance. Condé was able to leave the court in the spring of 1574. After reverting to his Calvinist faith, he went to the Palatinate to raise troops.¹² The failed coup at Saint-Germain coincided with a well-planned Huguenot uprising in many parts of France. Towns were seized in Lower Normandy, Poitou and the Rhône valley. Although desperately short of money, Charles IX issued a call to arms. Three armies were assembled: in Normandy under Matignon, in Poitou under Montpensier and in Dauphiné under the Prince-dauphin. They succeeded in recapturing a number of towns taken by the Huguenots.

In April 1574 another plot came to light. This time Alençon and Navarre planned to escape to Sedan. Charles IX ordered both men and Marshal Montmorency to be more closely guarded and the arrest of some 50 people, including the seigneur de la Mole and the comte de Coconat, the alleged ringleaders. La Mole denied all knowledge of a plot, but Coconat admitted that Alençon had planned to flee to Sedan. The latter, for his part, confessed that he had planned to go to the Netherlands while Navarre explained that he and Alençon had acted out of fear of another massacre. Once again Birague called for their execution, but Charles decided to spare them. La Mole and Coconat, however, were tried and executed. Marshals Montmorency and Cossé were imprisoned in the Bastille. Henri de Montmorency-Damville, the younger son of the famous constable Anne de Montmorency, remained at liberty, but Charles revoked his commission as governor of Languedoc and appointed the Prince-dauphin, Montpensier's son, in his place. But Damville was not easily displaced

¹² Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol 1, pp. 38–9.

as he disposed of an army and a numerous clientèle. On 29 May he signed a truce with the Huguenots of the Midi and later formed a union of moderate Catholics and Huguenots; in other words an alliance of 'malcontents' of both religions against the government.¹³

A Rock-like Crown

It was not unusual in Poland for a coronation to be accompanied by bloodshed. Henri's was no exception. A violent quarrel soon broke out between two aristocratic families, the Zborowski and the Tęczyński. It began during a joust. Samuel Zborowski in a fit of temper fell upon the Castellan Tęczyński within the precincts of the Wawel. During the affray a senator, called Wapowski, was mortally wounded. Such a crime, committed in the royal presence, called for severe punishment; usually death and infamy. On 26 February, the Senate took up the affair. Wapowski's body was brought before the king by a large crowd of relatives and friends. Henri hoped that the Senate would pass sentence, but it was too divided to do so. So the responsibility devolved on the king who had never had to sit in judgment before. On 10 March he sentenced Zborowski to banishment. This punishment, considered too harsh by the Zborowski and too light by the Wapowski, unleashed a wave of protest in the form of personal attacks on the king. Bills and posters appeared all over the town denouncing the lies that had secured his election. One was even found in his bed! Henri was accused of breaking his oath, of persecuting evangelicals, and of corruption. The French were denounced as sodomites. Henri tried in vain to silence his critics.¹⁴

The king now had to decide whether or not to sign a decree enforcing the Confederation of Warsaw. It was supported by the evangelicals in the Diet, but strongly opposed by the Senate. The matter was being debated when a pamphlet, entitled *Libellus cuneorum*, was published anonymously. The author, Solinowski, a humanist and devout Catholic, had written it at Henri's prompting with the complicity of Karnkowski, bishop of Włocławek. He argued that the Republic contained three orders – the king, the Senate and the nobility – and that legislation required the consent of all three. It followed that no law could have been made during the interregnum.¹⁵ That applied to the Confederation of

¹³ Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 34–8; *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 943, pp. 335–7.

¹⁴ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 101–10.

¹⁵ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

Warsaw. Solinowski called for the public good to take precedence over private interest. Jan Firlej was so furious that he had the pamphlet's printer imprisoned. Evangelicals were also angered on being told that Henri was refusing to take an oath that the Senate wished him to take. As he claimed to be unwell, the Senate suspended its sittings. On 30 March, following his recovery, Uchanski proposed that the terms of the Confederation of Warsaw be rejected and an oath favoured by Catholics retained. For three weeks the matter was hotly debated, neither side being prepared to give way. Taking advantage of the situation, Henri issued a decree confirming the nation's laws and privileges according to the ancient formulation he had accepted at his coronation. He promised to sign a new confirmation at the next Diet, this time with his own blood as was the Polish usage.¹⁶ Following the Diet's dissolution, he was able to relax for a few days in the neighbourhood of Cracow. He badly needed a respite after spending long hours in the Senate listening to speeches in Latin that he did not understand. Henri was now extremely unpopular among Polish evangelicals. His harshest critic, Orzelski, accused him of spending days dancing the *volta* in the gardens of Princess Anna's residence and nights playing cards with his fellow debauchees. Heidenstein, another Pole, wrote that Henri 'began to hunt with the Frenchmen of his entourage, to play cards, to give banquets and other entertainments, and it was said that young naked women were introduced into these festivities'.¹⁷

The days that followed the coronation were a time of intense diplomatic activity as foreign ambassadors called on Henri to salute him on their masters' behalf. None was stranger than the envoy of the Great Khan of Tartary who offered him 200,000 cavalry if he would make war on Muscovy. Henri would not commit himself, for he was penniless and the troops guarding Poland's eastern frontier had not been paid since the reign of Sigismund-Augustus. It was cheaper for him to dream of founding a law faculty at the university of Cracow and of sending young Poles to study in France. A number did so, but far fewer than a hundred.¹⁸ One of Henri's biggest headaches was Princess Anna whom the Poles expected him to marry. She was rich but plain, dressed like a nun and too old for childbearing. Henri had not refused to marry Elizabeth I of England in order to marry her! But she remained hopeful, for he called on her several of times and was seen on one occasion to hold her hand.¹⁹

¹⁶ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 135–51.

¹⁷ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 164–5.

¹⁸ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 175–9.

¹⁹ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 209–23.

According to Pierre Mathieu, Henry IV's historiographer, who owed the story to Beaulieu-Ruzé, one of Henri's companions in Poland: 'He wore that crown as if it were a rock on his head. During his painful exile, Henri's only solace was to write to France. Beaulieu ... told me that he sometimes sent forty or fifty letters, some of them three pages long. The bulk went to ladies of his acquaintance. When writing to a princess he would use blood taken from his finger.'²⁰ Henri also kept in close touch with his brother and mother. A steady flow of couriers – usually gentlemen of the king's chamber, travelled from Cracow to France bearing his news. The number left behind dwindled accordingly. Henri sent Retz back to France when he heard of a plot to place Alençon on the throne. Retz arrived in Paris on 6 June, a week after the death of Charles IX. In the meantime, Catherine de' Medici took steps to facilitate Henri's speedy return from Poland. On 6 June she sent instructions to du Ferrier, the French ambassador in Venice, along with a letter of credit enabling him to draw the sum of 100,000 *livres*. He was to send 12,000 *écus* to Vienna without delay and to keep the balance until further notice.²¹

Henri had, of course, been aware for some time that his brother's days were numbered. Knowing that he might soon be recalled to France, he deliberately set about reassuring the Poles by taking part in their festivals and banquets. He spoiled the nobility by giving them remunerative offices. The Venetian envoy, Lippomano, saw through his game: 'One month before he left,' he wrote, 'he tried to do everything that was contrary to his mind and temperament. He even flattered the Polish lords by cleverly adopting their attire.'²² But Henri was secretly planning to ditch his Polish subjects. On 14 June 1574 an imperial messenger brought the news of Charles IX's death. He was soon followed by two envoys, sent by Catherine de' Medici, confirming the news. 'I am grief-stricken,' she wrote, 'to have witnessed such a scene and the love which he showed me at the end. He could not leave me and begged me to send for you in great haste and pending your return to take charge of the government and to punish the prisoners who, he knew, were the cause of all the kingdom's ills.' His last words were '*Eh, ma mère*'. 'My only consolation,' she wrote, 'is to see you here soon, as your kingdom requires, and in good health, for if I were to lose you, I would have myself buried alive with you.' Catherine urged Henri to return to France by the safest route, namely through the Empire and Italy, and not to let the Poles

²⁰ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, p. 192.

²¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1943), Vol. 5, p. 9.

²² Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, p. 256.

detain him. She suggested that he might promise to send them his brother or his own second son by a future marriage. Meanwhile, the Poles might be left to rule themselves with an elected Frenchman. 'I think this would please them,' she added, 'as they would be their own kings.' Catherine then advised Henri to treat his servants well but impartially. 'I beg you,' she said, 'not to give anything until you are here, for only then will you know who has served you well or not; I will tell you their names and point them out to you. I will keep all benefices and offices that will fall vacant. We shall tax them as there is not an *écu* left to do all the things you need to do to maintain your kingdom. Your late brother has entrusted me with that task, and I will not let you down: I will do my best to hand it over to you entire and at peace so that you should not have to work for your greatness and to allow you a little pleasure after so much worry and care ... The experience you have gained from your voyage is such that I am sure that there has never been a king as wise as you ... Since you left I have had only worry on top of worry: thus I believe that your return will bring me joy and contentment on top of contentment and that I will no longer have trouble or annoyance. I pray God that it may be so and that I may see you in good health and soon.'²³

Showing considerable self-control, Henri kept the news from France to himself. When the Grand-Chamberlain, Tęczyński, reminded him that he was due to take part in a tournament, he said that he felt too tired to do so. That evening he consulted his French entourage about what action to take. Pomponne and Souvré advised against a clandestine departure which they thought would seriously damage his reputation; but Villequier and Pibrac argued in favour of flight.²⁴ Having made up his mind to leave, Henri asked Larchant, the captain of his guard, and Souvré to find out how to leave Cracow unnoticed and to prepare horses and guides. On the 15 June he informed the Senate personally that he was not planning to leave before the arrival of more nobles from France and asked them to summon the Diet for September. He also asked them to sign letters in which he appointed his mother as regent during his absence from France. On the same day, however, he wrote to La Mothe-Fénelon, the French ambassador in London: 'I hope soon to settle the affairs of my kingdom of Poland in order to travel soon afterwards to France where I can see from the dispatches that I have received from the queen, my mother, that my presence is much needed.'²⁵ On 17 June, Bellièvre, Charles IX's ambassador, took leave of the Senate. He

²³ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. IV, pp. 310–12; Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), pp. 315–17.

²⁴ Champion, *Henri III, roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 256–60.

²⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 955, pp. 343–4.

explained that he had been recalled to France, but, in reality, he had been ordered by Henri to prepare relays of horses on the road leading to the Austrian border. Next day, after receiving ambassadors who had come to offer their condolences for the death of Charles IX, Henri wrote to the Senate, the bishop of Cracow and to several crown dignitaries telling them of his regret at leaving Poland while stressing his urgent need to take possession of his kingdom of France.²⁶ He also wrote to Charles de Danzay and Nicolas Alamanni asking them to do everything possible to dissuade the Poles from electing a new king as he wished to remain their king. He also asked them to speak to the Infanta Anna, and to safeguard property he would be leaving behind.²⁷ That evening, as Henri was dining, a steward informed him that a rumour was circulating that he was about to quit Poland. He replied merely: 'Men of understanding, like yourself, will not believe it.'²⁸ According to Lippomano, the king spent two hours in pleasant conversation with his Polish courtiers. He told them that he hoped to take up Polish dancing and wished to get used to drinking beer. He then retired to bed, as usual. Tenczyncki, the Grand-Chamberlain, closed the curtains around his bed then withdrew. But Henri did not fall asleep. Two of his French companions slipped into the room and helped him to dress. All three then made their way to a door at a lower level leading on to a street. One of them, Souvré, persuaded a guard to open it by telling him that he was on a romantic assignation. Around midnight the three men joined the horses that had been prepared for them. By now other Frenchmen had joined the party. The night was dark and the road beyond the walls of Cracow lay deserted and silent. After narrowly avoiding a marsh, the fugitives entered a dense pine forest where they became lost until they found a woodman willing to guide them through it. At dawn, they reached Zator, some 20 leagues from Cracow. Soon afterwards, at Oswiecim (now better known as Auschwitz) they were joined by four more of Henri's French entourage: Pibrac, Villequier, Caylus and Beauvais-Nangis.

Meanwhile, in Cracow, the king's flight had been discovered. On finding his bed empty, Count Tenczynski set off with some 200 horsemen to find him. About 5 a.m. they were joined by more than a thousand horsemen. Henri, in the meantime, managed to cross a river over a bridge which was then destroyed. Tenczynski then appeared on the far bank. Seeing Henri, he called out: 'Serene Majesty, why are you fleeing?' (*Serenissima Majestas, cur fugis?*) Eventually, he caught up with the king at Ples in Austria. As he was about to dismount, Henri

²⁶ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 267–9.

²⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 960, pp. 348–9.

²⁸ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, p. 270.

ordered him not to. 'My friend,' he said 'while I am taking up the succession given to me by God, I am not renouncing that which He has given me by election, for my shoulders are strong enough to support both crowns.' Refusing to return to Cracow, he ordered the chamberlain to do so. 'Return, Monsieur, return!' he said, 'You will find on a small table in my chamber various letters in my hand. They will tell you why I am going to France. I am not renouncing my Polish throne; I am leaving in order eventually to return.' Deeply moved, Tenczynski drew blood from his arm and, cupping it in his hands, swallowed it as a demonstration of lifelong loyalty. He offered Henri a bracelet while begging Henri to give him an aglet as a memento. Souvré remarked that such a demonstration of loyalty deserved more than an aglet whereupon Henri gave Tenczynski a diamond worth 1,200 crowns. The chamberlain and his company then set off for Cracow, leaving Henri and his companions free to continue their journey.²⁹

There was discontent and confusion in Poland following Henri's flight. Most nobles were ready to declare the throne vacant, but the clergy, led by the bishops and supported by the senators, wanted Henri to remain on the throne. A Convocation Diet on 24 August 1574 recognized him as king but warned him that he must return to Poland on or before 12 May 1575 if he wished to retain his crown. When he failed to do so, a gathering of nobles declared the throne vacant. A new election was held. Among the candidates were the emperor Maximilian II and his son, Archduke Ernest. French diplomats tried to prevent a Habsburg from being chosen. On 12 December the Primate Uchanski proclaimed the election of Maximilian II as king of Poland, but the nobles rejected him. They recognized instead Stephen Bathory, prince of Transylvania. He was acclaimed by a Diet on 18 January 1576 and, soon afterwards, he formally accepted all the conditions laid down by the Polish nobles. He was crowned in Cracow on 29 April and married Anna the next day. Bathory's election was welcomed by French diplomats and even, it seems, by Henri although officially he opposed papal recognition of Bathory's royal title.³⁰

Henri's relief on leaving Poland was echoed by his entourage. In April 1574 Arnaud du Ferrier writing to Catherine de' Medici, reported: 'the roads are crowded with Frenchmen who are leaving Poland and seeking to excuse their sudden departure by complaining of the crude and bad treatment they had received from the Poles'. Pamphlets written by Henri's companions criticized

²⁹ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 1, pp. 271–8.

³⁰ *The Cambridge History of Poland to 1696*, ed. W.F. Reddaway, J.H. Penson, O. Halecki and R. Dyboski (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 374–8; Stanislas Grzybowski, 'Henri III et Étienne Bathory' in *Henri III et son temps*, ed. Robert Sauzet (Paris, 1992), pp. 93–101.

them for spending so much time feasting and getting drunk. The Poles were described as anarchical, hot-tempered, boastful and garrulous. *Adieu Pologne*, a famous poem by Philippe Desportes did not mince words:

*Adieu Pologne, adieu plaines desertes
Toujours de neige et de glaces couvertes,
Adieu pais d'un eternel adieu:
Ton air, tes mœurs m'ont si fort sceu desplaire
Qu'il faudra bien que tout me soit contraire
Si jamais plus je retourne en ce lieu*

Farewell Poland, farewell deserted plains,
Always covered in snow and ice,
Farewell country, for ever farewell,
Your air, your manners have so displeased me
That everything would need to turn against me
If ever more I were to return there

Polish noblemen and scholars, who liked to think of themselves as in the van of European culture, were shocked to be thus described. Desportes' poem soon prompted scathing replies, notably Kochanowski's *Gallo crociatante* (*to the Frenchman who croaks like a toad*). Poles felt let down. No king of theirs had ever given up his crown voluntarily. A popular saying expressed their resentment: 'King Henri has done the Poles a bad turn: elected at night, he came at night, and, like a traitor, he fled at night.'³¹

³¹ Janusz Tazbir, 'Henri de Valois aux yeux de ses sujets' *Henri III et son temps*, ed. Robert Sauzet (Paris, 1992), pp. 69–86.

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Chapter 6

Homeward Bound

On 22 June 1574, three days after his flight from Poland, Henri (whom we shall now call Henry in accordance with the practice of anglicizing regnal names) wrote to his mother from Gross Wisternitz (now Vesíki Bystrice) in Moravia telling her how pleased he was to have followed her recommended itinerary instead of listening to Monluc who had wanted him to remain in Poland. With a passport sent by the Emperor, he reckoned that he would reach Vienna in two days. 'I will follow your advice,' he continued. 'Having seen Germany, I will go to Italy and to Venice. Then I will go to my lord of Savoy and will see Madame (Marguerite de France, the daughter of King Francis I) which will give me much pleasure.' Catherine could rest assured that he would make no promise or gift without knowing her approval. 'I am your son who has always obeyed you,' he wrote, 'and I am more resolute and dedicated than ever. May God keep you in the best of health for that is my only wish.' No news, he said, had reached him from Poland, but he had left letters with Danzay and Alamanni for the Senate and others explaining his departure. 'France and you,' he continued, 'are worth more than Poland!' He asked Catherine to order the French nobility to meet him in Lyons. Henry ended his letter by asking her always to love him as he would always be her servant.¹

On 24 June Henry reached Wolkersdorf, three leagues from Vienna, where he was met by the Emperor Maximilian II's two sons, Mathias and Maximilian. Nearer Vienna, the Emperor, although in poor health, came out to meet him. Addressing Henry either as 'my son' or 'my brother', he invited him to sit with him in his coach. He was keen to talk about his daughter, Elizabeth, Charles IX's widow. Maybe he would have liked Henry to marry her, but that was not to be. Much impressed by the warmth of his reception, Henry described Maximilian as the 'most accomplished nobleman in Europe'. In fact, he enjoyed his time in Vienna so much that he stayed there three days instead of only one, as intended.² On 29 June, on entering Styria, he wrote to Du Ferrier, his ambassador in Venice, thanking him for 12,000 *écus* – a gift from Catherine de' Medici – which

¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 967, pp. 357–9.

² Pierre Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne* (Paris, 1943), Vol. 2, pp. 7–30.

he had recently sent him.³ It took Henry only about 10 days to cross the Alps. On 6 July he thanked the Venetian government from Carinthia for a passport he had received. Four days later, he reached Pontebba in the Venetian *terra firma*.⁴ On learning that the *Signoria* was about to appoint a number of noblemen to serve his meals, he asked du Ferrier to remind it, as tactfully as possible, that kings of France were traditionally served only by their own gentlemen.⁵

Never having entertained a king of France before, the Venetian republic was determined to give Henry a memorable reception. He had no sooner set foot on its soil than four ambassadors extraordinary welcomed him. On 11 July, a deputation of nobles led by Mocenigo, governor of Friuli, and a military detachment received him triumphantly. Continuing his journey in a coach pulled by four horses supplied by the *Signoria*, Henry was joined near Venzon by his friend, the duc de Nevers. Next day, at San Daniele, they were joined by Alfonso II d'Este duke of Ferrara. At Feltre, Belluno and other small towns large crowds turned out to greet the royal visitor and his suite. At Conegliano Henry passed through a gateway decorated with the arms of France and statues of St. Mark. In one street, two pyramids painted with the arms of Poland, France and Anjou had been erected. Here, too, Carlo Pascale delivered the first of many Latin speeches in praise of the king that were to punctuate his progress across north Italy. Du Ferrier kept Catherine de' Medici informed of her son's reception. 'He is admired by everyone,' he wrote, 'not only on account of his handsome presence, but also of the regal sweetness and humanity shining in his face and of the excellent spirit and understanding shown in his conversation.'⁶ At Lavadino, Henry and his company crossed a bridge specially constructed and adorned with his coat of arms and mottoes. Outside Treviso, on 15 July, he was met by the *podestà* of Murano and a large number of city notables, gentlemen-at-arms and soldiers. They escorted him to the city gate where he was welcomed by the bishop and clergy before going in procession to the cathedral. Here, after more speeches and prayers, Henry received the kiss of peace. Accompanied by trumpets and drums, the procession proceeded to the main square through three arches painted with scenes depicting Henry's victories over rebels and heretics. Such references to the recent religious troubles in France and to Henry's role in defending the faith were to become a *leitmotif* of his visit to north Italy. From Treviso, his party travelled to Mestre where

³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, No. 972, p. 362.

⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, No. 973, p. 363.

⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, No. 974, pp. 363–4.

⁶ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 2, pp. 44–57.

a delirious crowd almost prevented 70 senators from greeting the king. At Marghera, Giovanni Correr, a former Venetian ambassador to France, dressed from head to foot in gold cloth, formally welcomed him. Henry then took one of three gondolas manned by gondoliers wearing his own yellow livery with blue edging. He asked for the hood to be removed so that he might get a better view of the surroundings. Two thousand gondolas escorted him. At San Luigi, 40 boats carrying young noblemen formed a half-moon around his gondola. Beyond San Cristoforo, the king was greeted by the *podestà* of Murano, accompanied by 500 more gondolas. The island of Murano, long renowned for its glass-making, was at this time a favourite resort of humanists, several of whom built houses there and laid out gardens. As Henry disembarked, he was saluted by 60 halberdiers under Scipione Costanzo, a *condottiere* who had served Francis I and Henry II, and by 20 musicians playing instruments. A lavish banquet awaited him at the Palazzo Capello, but he and Alfonso d'Este preferred to go off on their own. They spent much of the night in a gondola on the Grand Canal looking at the palaces and only returned to Murano around 2 a.m.

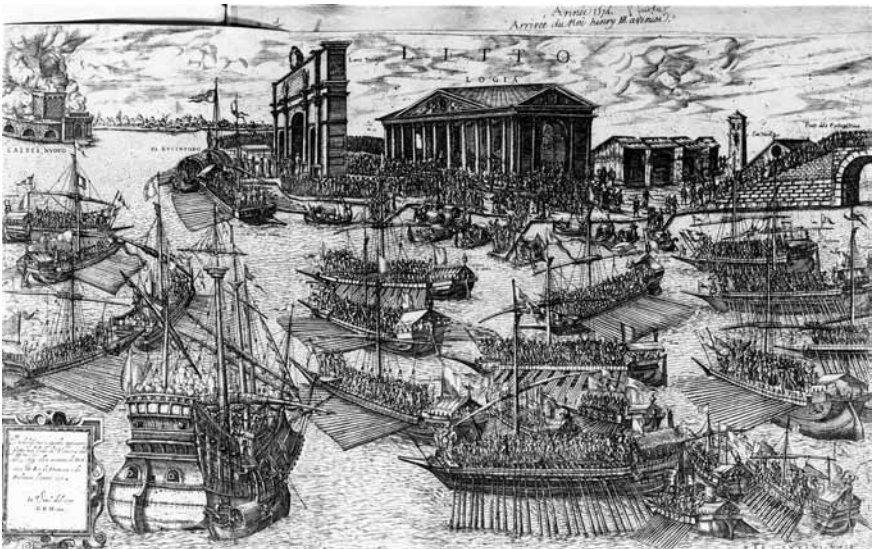


Figure 6.1 Arrival of Henry III of France at the Lido of Venice, 18 July 1574. Etching; Italian school, sixteenth century. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.



Figure 6.2 The Ca' Foscari on the Grand Canal where Henry III resided during his stay in Venice.

Source: Photo RJK.

On 18 July the Doge, Alvise Mocenigo, called at the Palazzo Capello after Henry had attended mass at a monastery nearby. They exchanged greetings, then boarded a magnificent galley manned by 300 oarsmen who wore violet tunics in mourning for Charles IX and pointed bonnets adorned with a fleur-de-lys. On reaching the Lido, the galley dropped anchor opposite a triumphal arch and a loggia said to have been designed by Andrea Palladio. The arch was made of wood imitating marble and decorated with statues, inscriptions and paintings. The main decorative themes were those of Venice as dispenser of peace and justice and of Henry as 'Defender of the Faith'. Above three arches were paintings by Veronese and Tintoretto celebrating his victories at Jarnac and Moncontour, and his election as king of Poland. The façade of the loggia, a tall and airy structure, also painted to imitate marble, consisted of 10 Corinthian columns joined by garlands. Painted on the ceiling inside the loggia were four

figures of Victory holding laurel wreaths. Niches along the rear wall contained statues of the Virtues. Once Henry had disembarked, he was received by the entire *Signoria* and escorted towards the arch under a baldachin of cloth of gold borne by the six procurators of San Marco, one of whom was Sebastiano Venier, soon to be elected doge in recognition of his valour at the battle of Lepanto in 1571. After passing through the arch, the procession moved to the loggia where Henry was received by the patriarch of Venice, Giovanni Trevisan, and the clergy. They escorted him to the church of San Nicoló for a *Te Deum*. Only then was he taken to Venice on the *Bucintoro*, the gilded state barge in which the Doge rode out to the Lido to marry the sea every Ascension Day. Henry sat on a throne beneath a canopy, slightly above the Doge and the cardinal of San Sisto. The *Signoria* and patricians who filled the decks wore magnificent costumes of silk and velvet strewn with pearls. Behind the *Bucintoro* were three gondolas assigned to the king's service and the boats of the various trade guilds. 'I only wish my mother could be here!' said Henry.⁷ As they reached the quay at San Marco, vessels moved aside to allow the *Bucintoro* to enter the Grand Canal. Galleys fired their cannon, the great bell of San Marco began to toll and the bells of the city's many campaniles responded. About 6 p.m. the *Bucintoro* reached the Ca' Foscari which was to be Henry's residence during his stay. It occupied a commanding position at a bend on the Grand Canal, as it still does. After visiting his apartment, Henry appeared on a balcony to acknowledge the acclamations of the people. As darkness fell, thousands of candles and oil lamps illuminated the Grand Canal. That evening Henry and Alfonso d'Este attended an elaborate supper at the Fondaco dei Turchi where the king met the company of actors, known as the *Gelosì*, which he had longed to see perform. Returning to the Ca' Foscari around dawn, he saw its windows being prepared for regattas due to take place that afternoon on the Grand Canal. Henry honoured them with his presence, but that night, still accompanied by Alfonso, he called on Veronica Franco, one of Venice's most famous courtesans. She was a poet and a friend of Titian and gave her portrait to the king.⁸

⁷ Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, Vol. 2, p. 61.

⁸ *Europa Triumphant: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe*, ed. J.R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Margaret Shewring (Aldershot, 2004), Vol. 1, pp. 105–83; Iain Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London, 2007), pp. 193–215.

Early on 20 July Emmanuel-Philibert, duke of Savoy, whom Catherine de' Medici had asked to act as Henry's mentor during his Italian progress, turned up at the Ca' Foscari. The duke had married Marguerite, Henry II's sister and was a distinguished soldier (he had defeated the French at the battle of St. Quentin). He was considered wise, but also crafty. Though seemingly pleased to see him, Henry avoided discussing affairs of state with him. After attending mass at San Stefano, the king returned to the Ca' Foscari where he was again welcomed by the Doge and *Signoria*. Later that day rafts bearing a huge furnace from Murano were anchored in front of the palace and the king watched a team of glassblowers work far into the night making objects of glass and crystal. Next day, the *Bucintoro* carried him to the Piazzetta. After mass at San Marco, Henry attended a banquet in the vast hall of the Great Council within the Doge's Palace. The guests numbered 3,000 and the sideboards were loaded with silver and gold plate worth 200,000 crowns. After the meal, Henry asked to see the rooms where the famous Council of Ten met. On returning to the hall, he attended a performance of Frangipane's *Tragedia* by the *Gelosi*. It began with a prelude for 15 trumpets and five drummers after which Proteus sang accompanied by a lute. The music was composed by Claudio Merulo, organist at San Marco. The play consisted of a 'sequence of speeches, choruses and instrumental interludes stitched together in a continuous musical fabric.'⁹ One of the interludes was a *Coro* in which 'all the instruments that had ever been heard of' took part. Later that evening, songs by Andrea Gabrieli were sung by serenaders who each night entertained the king on the Grand Canal. After resting in the Doge's apartment, he returned to the Ca' Foscari by gondola. That evening, he and Alfonso slipped out unrecognized and did not return till noon the following day. No one knows how they spent their time. After refreshing himself, Henry called on the Doge as he was chairing a meeting of the Senate that was discussing French affairs. The Doge advised Henry to bring peace to his kingdom by conceding a general pardon to his subjects, but he replied that this would be difficult without undermining his own authority. On leaving the Senate, Henry went to the church of Santa Maria Formosa where Giovanni Grimani, patriarch of Aquileja, showed him his cabinet of antiquities. He also offered him a ball in which 30 noble ladies performed a *galliard*. About 8 p.m. the king returned to the Ca' Foscari only to slip out once more incognito. On 23 July, he spent the morning at the Rialto visiting shops where he bought jewels and gold chains as gifts for the Venetians who had served him during his stay. He spent more than he could afford, incurring debts which du Ferrier was left to settle after his departure. Henry was dining with the

⁹ Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City*, p. 209.

ambassador when his half-brother, Henri d'Angoulême, arrived with a message from his mother urging him to hasten back to France, but the king was reluctant to do so. He ended a letter to Alençon: 'From Venice where I should like to stay in order to enjoy myself as I am indeed doing now'.¹⁰

On 24 July Henry, after attending mass at San Giorgio Maggiore, visited the Arsenal where he was shown trophies from Lepanto and watched a galley being built from scratch or fitted out in record time. On being offered sweetmeats, he was startled to be given a napkin made of sugar which fell apart in his hands. He next called on Veronese who, despite his advanced years, was still painting. The king then watched a display of fencing and another performance by the *Gelosì*, this time a *pastoral* at the Palazzo Giustiniani. At 4 p.m. he and the duke of Savoy returned to the Doges' palace on the *Bucintoro* to attend a meeting of the Great Council where, having just been made members of the Venetian nobility, they signed the famous *Libro d'oro*. Henry consecrated his new status by nominating Jacopo Contarini as a senator in the *Consiglio de' Pregadi*.

At 2 p.m. on 25 July Henry returned to the Doges' Palace to attend a ball organized by the *compagnie della calza*, associations of young unmarried patricians who owed their name to the brightly coloured hose they wore. The hall on this occasion was adorned with rich fabrics, flowers and Turkish carpets. Two hundred of the most beautiful noblewomen, all dressed in white and dripping with pearls, had been assembled. After passing in front of the king, they danced a *pavana*, then a *gagliarda*, with 40 gentlemen. Fond as he was of dancing Henry did not take part: he merely watched, sitting under a canopy.¹¹ On the following afternoon, he witnessed a traditional battle between the *Nicolotti* and the *Castellani*, who represented two districts in Venice. The *Nicolotti* were mostly fishermen and the *Castellani* workers from the Arsenal. They fought for the possession of a bridge. Normally this was the Ponte dei Pugni at San Barnaba, but on this occasion the bridge of the Carmini was selected so that Henry and his friends might watch the contest from the balcony of the Palazzo Foscari. In the past, such fights had invariably turned into brawls in which blows were exchanged, not only with fists but also with sticks and knives. Fatalities had been common. On this occasion, the Venetian authorities tried to regulate the combat, but it soon turned to chaos. A fist fight between two men became a general brawl fought by large numbers of men wielding hard sticks with sharpened ends. Spectators on balconies and rooftops joined in, hurling stones, tiles and other objects. Some of the combatants fell into the canal and

¹⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 976, p. 364.

¹¹ Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City*, pp. 210–11.

drowned; others were trampled underfoot and many were wounded. Henry said: 'If they are doing this for fun, it's too much; if they are doing it for real, it's too little'. When, after two hours, a fisherman whose skill and bravery he had admired was about to be trampled on by *Castellani*, Henry stretched out his arm signalling an end to the combat.¹²

Before leaving Venice, Henry asked to see 40 young noblemen who had served him during his stay. Speaking in French, with du Ferrier acting as interpreter, he thanked them for their services and promised to treat them as well if they should ever come to France. He asked for their names in writing and gave each one a gold chain. At 11 a.m. the Doge and the *Signoria* joined him for mass in a private chapel at the Doges' Palace. Then, as Henry was about to leave for Fusina, he asked the Doge to concede a number of letters of remission. As the crowd outside cheered and guns fired salvoes, they set off across the lagoon escorted by a large number of brightly decorated gondolas. At Fusina, the two rulers bid each other farewell and Henry expressed his gratitude by giving Doge Mocenigo a diamond ring valued at 10,000 ducats. A gilded barge then carried him and his party along the Brenta canal to Padua. They stopped on the way at the Villa Foscari, known as *La Malcontenta*, one of Andrea Palladio's most beautiful villas. Henry also visited the Villa Contarini at Mira. Around 7 p.m. he reached Padua where a triumphal arch had been erected in his honour. It was adorned not only with pictorial reminders of his military victories, but also, unusually, of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. After only one night in Padua, Henry moved to Rovigo where he slept on 28 July. Next day, he bid farewell and gave various presents, including gold chains, to the Venetians who had accompanied him this far. At Ferrara, he found himself in a court under French influence, for duchess Renée, the mother of duke Alfonso II, had received many of her compatriots, especially Calvinists, at her court. While Henry was there, Jacques de Faye, sieur d'Espece, arrived from France with a message from Catherine de' Medici advising him to choose the shortest route back to France, avoiding Switzerland. This lay through the duchy of Savoy. Catherine hoped that duke Emmanuel-Philibert would be able to arrange a meeting between Henry and Montmorency-Damville, governor of Languedoc, who had signed a truce with the Huguenots of the Midi due to expire on 1 January 1575. On 1 August, Henry wrote to Damville assuring him of the love he felt for him and his family. He explained that he was returning to France not to shed the blood

¹² Robert C. Davis, 'The Spectacle Almost Fit for a King. Venice's *Guerra de' canne* of 26 July 1574' in *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, ed. Ellen E. Kittell and Thomas F. Madden (Urbana and Chicago, 1999), pp. 181–212; Fenlon, *Ceremonial City*, pp. 211–13.

of his subjects but to embrace them all equally as 'a good prince needs to do ... to retain their obedience'. He asked Damville to come to Turin as soon as possible where he would find him ready to listen to his excuses and complaints. Damville, he added, need have no fear as he, Henry, was a man of his word. 'Come,' he wrote in his own hand at the end of the letter, 'and find me at the home of my uncle, Monsieur de Savoie. You will be entirely safe there; you will please me and be very welcome.'¹³

That same day Henry left Ferrara. He sailed down the Po on three barges furnished as a chapel, a bedchamber and a living room. On 3 August he arrived in Mantua where he spent only three nights at the court of the Gonzagas. Here again he passed through triumphal arches celebrating his victories and bearing reminders of the place occupied by Mantua among the small principalities of northern Italy.¹⁴ As he resumed his journey on the Po, the marquis of Ayamonte, the Spanish governor of Milan, welcomed him on behalf of King Philip II. Henry next stopped at Cremona and Monza, where, on 10 August, he met Carlo Borromeo, cardinal-archbishop of Milan, who was to personify the Catholic Counter-Reformation.¹⁵ He was only 35 at the time, but his physique was already undermined by asceticism. In the course of two conversations with Henry, Borromeo accused France's rulers of bringing Catholicism into discredit in their kingdom. They had tried to solve their problems, he said, without serving God or seeking His aid. Henry assured him that he would not commit the same mistake. Duly impressed, Borromeo wrote to Pope Gregory XIII, praising Henry's seriousness, politeness, gentleness, patience, modesty and piety. At their last meeting, he gave him a golden crucifix containing wood from the true cross crucifix. The cardinal's final verdict on the king was shrewd: 'He is a very edifying prince who is capable of doing good provided he is helped. He will need to be surrounded by people who can advise him and speak to him truthfully and sincerely.'¹⁶ Borromeo seems to have made a great impression on Henry. He may have expounded some of the hopes and plans that he shared with the Counter-Reformation. This movement laid a great emphasis on penitence, both for individual sins and the sins of the world, and an emphasis on Good Works. Borromeo himself put these ideas into practice. Brought up in luxury, he adopted a life of extreme asceticism and used revenues from benefices to found

¹³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, No. 985, pp. 369–70.

¹⁴ Delphine Carrangeot, 'L'entrée d'Henri III à Mantoue en 1574: une lecture italienne des victoires militaires catholiques' in *Le Bruit des armes*, ed. Jérémie Foa and Paul-Alexis Mellet (Paris, 2012), pp. 179–98.

¹⁵ Champion, *Henri III, roi de Pologne*, Vol. 2, pp. 99–107.

¹⁶ Champion, *Henri III, roi de Pologne*, Vol. 2, p. 107.

hospitals and monasteries and to build and restore churches. In 1576 he assumed control of Milan during a terrible plague, caring for the stricken population after the governor had fled. Borromeo died in 1584 and was canonized in 1610.¹⁷

After overnight stops at Magenta and Vercelli, Henry reached Turin, capital of the duchy of Savoy, on 15 August.¹⁸ Two days later, duke Emmanuel-Philibert invited Henri de Montmorency-Damville, the ex-governor of Languedoc, to come to his court. Henry, he said, was well-disposed towards him. He hoped that the king would satisfy Damville once he was back in France. After a triumphal entry into Turin, the king was treated to a ceaseless round of festivities. He got on famously with his aunt, the duchess Marguerite, whom he had not seen since he was eight years old. She persuaded him to give up the towns of Pinerolo, Savigliano and Perugia, France's last possessions in Piedmont, which had been conceded in the treaty of Fossano of 2 November 1562 in exchange for Turin and three other major towns in Savoy which France had given to Emmanuel-Philibert in return for his military help during the first of her religious wars.¹⁹ As a result of Henry's action, France retained only the marquisate of Saluzzo beyond the Alps. It was not what the Italian princes who had honoured him in Venice had expected or wanted: Emmanuel-Philibert was generally distrusted by them. In effect, Henry handed over the key to the Alps to a former enemy and doubtful ally. Furthermore, he did so on his own authority without even consulting his council. Italians at the French court were dismayed. It was a high-handed action which augured badly. The chancellor Birague refused to seal the royal letters ceding the territories, and the duc de Nevers, who was governor of France's Italian possessions insisted on his disapproval being formally registered. How Catherine de' Medici reacted to her son's action is uncertain. She was extremely fond of her sister-in-law, Marguerite of Savoy, and hastened to reassure her husband that Henry would honour his word. 'There is no one,' she wrote on 1 October, 'who can prevent the king my son from keeping his promise, as you will have seen on the arrival of the *Grand Prieur* (Henri d'Angoulême) and the secretary Sauve who, I assume, are recently satisfying your wish and that of the king.' Catherine was sorry that Marguerite, who had just died, was no longer there to share their satisfaction. While Henry was still in Turin he received a letter containing more advice from his mother. He needed to show now that he was the master and not just a companion, she wrote. People should not be

¹⁷ Edouard Frémy, *Henri III pénitent*. (Paris, 1885), p. 8; Champion, P., *Ronsard et son temps*, p. 340.

¹⁸ Champion, *Henri III, roi de Pologne*, Vol. 2, pp. 111–23.

¹⁹ Jean-H. Mariéjol, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris: Hachette, 1920), p. 248.

allowed to think 'he is young; we can make him do as we please'. He was to avoid giving way to any demand that was backed by a threat. By so doing, he would encourage others to behave correctly.



Figure 6.3 Frontispiece of *Coronatio di Polonia et di Francia* by Pietro Buccio (Padua, 1576). Dedicated to Catherine de' Medici, the work celebrates Henry III's visit to North Italy. Engraving by Domenico Zenoni.

Source: Photo RJK.

On 20 August Henri de Montmorency-Damville arrived in Turin. A handsome man, aged 40, he enjoyed the protection of an Albanian bodyguard and a tame wolf. As governor of the Languedoc, he had become disenchanted with royal policy. He could not forgive the imprisonment of his elder brother, marshal François de Montmorency, and of his kinsman, marshal de Cossé, who had been implicated in the plot of La Mole and Coconat. And following the

death of Charles IX, Catherine de' Medici, acting as regent, notified Damville that she had appointed the Prince-dauphin as governor of Languedoc in his place. Though Damville was a zealous Catholic, he and his party of moderate Catholics or *Politiques* formed an alliance with the Huguenots in Languedoc and seemed poised to rebel. Damville's main purpose, however, was to regain royal favour by a show of force. Henry, for his part, could not let slip the chance of regaining the support of a fine soldier and astute politician who disposed of a large army and numerous *clientèle*. So the meeting in Turin was mutually significant. Damville was warmly received by Henry, who even invited him to share his bedroom. He listened to Damville's account of his relations with the Huguenots but would not concede all the demands he made on their behalf. He was only prepared to grant them freedom of conscience and the right to hold baptisms and weddings in gatherings of not more than 10 people. When Damville asked for the release of François de Montmorency, Henry deferred a decision. He restored him to his *gouvernement* while offering him the marquise of Saluzzo instead. Damville was not tempted, however: his mind was set on returning to Languedoc. Catherine wanted the king to hang on to Damville for the present, but a letter she wrote to this effect arrived too late.

On 27 August Henry left Turin, accompanied by Emmanuel-Philibert, who had provided him with an escort of 400 infantry and had also sent ahead 5,000 infantry and 400 cavalry to ensure the king's security. The two men travelled across Savoy, passing through Rivoli, Avigliana and Susa. Henry's suite had never ceased to grow since he had left Poland. It now comprised at least 837 persons and more than 809 horses. The duke's suite may have been as large. Damville accompanied the king as far as Susa before returning to Turin. On 29 August Henry crossed the Mont Cenis sitting comfortably in a litter. Next day he wrote to the duchess of Savoy from Modane telling her that his mother wanted Damville to remain in Turin till 12 September so that she might have time to advise him on how to deal with the ex-governor. On 2 September Henry made his solemn entry into Chambéry which had spent a quarter of its annual revenue on preparations for this event. Next day, the two parties reached the Franco-Savoyan border on the river Guiers at Pont de Beauvoisin. François d'Alençon and Henri de Navarre were waiting on the French bank. Catherine, in the meantime, left Lyons for Bourgoin where, on 5 September, she was able once again to kiss her favourite son. Next day he made his entry into Lyons.

Chapter 7

King of France

As soon as Catherine de' Medici knew that Henry had reached Italy, she sent him a letter of advice on how to run his new kingdom of France. Well aware of his weaknesses, she advised him, first of all, to be the 'master', not just a 'companion'. No one should be allowed to think that they could treat him as they pleased because of his youth: he should refuse to satisfy anyone demanding a favour under threat of disobedience. Henry would only need to stand up to two or three of the most arrogant lords for the rest to fall into line. His favours should be reserved for those who had served him diligently. Catherine urged him to rate an office above a person. An unworthy appointment, she explained, could seriously damage his service. Henry should avoid favouring a few, who would assume that they alone were important and would stand up to him instead of acknowledging their debt to him. He needed to enlist the support of as many people as possible in the provinces by giving them offices, dignities and benefices. In particular, he should follow the example set by Louis XI and Francis I of favouring the bishops who were all powerful in their dioceses. But Henry needed, first of all, to regulate his court. He should rise each morning at a fixed time and ask for the latest state dispatches to be brought to him so that he might read them himself and dictate answers to his secretaries. Petitioners should address him personally, not the secretaries of state, for they should understand that he was the fount of all favours. By so doing, people would look up to him and obey him. He should also reduce the size of his council, get rid of the *conseil des finances*, and follow the example of Francis I under whom the privy council only considered legal disputes among his subjects after examining affairs of state. Catherine stressed the urgency of giving effect to such reforms 'for if he does not do so from the start he will never do so ... If I had been as he is now (that is to say, with so much authority and freedom of action), I would have done so'. Finally, she wrote: 'he can do everything, but he must will it so!'¹

¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1909), Vol. V, p. 73, 75–6: 'Mémoires pour monstrier à monsieur le roy mon fils', BnF, ms.fr. 6625, fol. 49 ro. The letter has been conjecturally dated 8 August 1574.

Following his arrival in Lyons, Henry followed his mother's advice. He reduced the size of his council to eight members. It was made up of old councillors loyal to Catherine and new men devoted to Henry since his youth. René de Birague, as chancellor, was the council's chairman when the king was absent. Old royal servants were retained: Jean de Monluc, bishop of Valence, who had successfully negotiated the Polish election, kept a seat which he had occupied since the reign of Francis I. Paul de Foix, who had served the crown for 20 years, retained his although he was suspected of heresy since 1559. Catherine appreciated his moderation and diplomatic gifts. The indispensable Morvillier was accompanied by Sébastien de l'Aubespine, bishop of Limoges whose influence at court had never ceased to grow in recent years. But Henry added men who had served him indefatigably for some years. Philippe Hurault, seigneur de Cheverny, a former *parlementaire* and *maitre des requêtes* had been his chancellor when he was duc d'Anjou. Lastly, there was Guy du Faur de Pibrac, a distinguished Latin scholar from Toulouse and the king's *avocat général* in the Parlement since 1565. He had been with Henry in Poland where he had composed his Latin speeches.² Princes of the blood could attend, but only if invited. Bellièvre was appointed *Surintendant des finances*, which, in effect, meant the end of the *Conseil des finances*. The royal finances thus fell under the control of a single individual. Bellièvre got to know his master well. In 1592 he described him as 'a very suspicious master who was also quick to form a bad impression of his servants'.³ As a courtier, Bellièvre took care to be tactful and to listen.

Henry also insisted on being shown dispatches so that he might answer them himself. The role of secretaries of state, who had got into the habit of opening them and taking decisions on their own, was reduced to drafting the orders of the king and council. Henry also began regulating his court. Disliking familiarity, he set about distancing himself from courtiers. On 12 September the Spanish envoy, Zuñiga, reported that only two or three persons would henceforth enjoy free access to the royal bedchamber. The Venetian ambassador, Morosini, wrote that the king's table was to be protected by a barrier and the king served only by noblemen, no longer by lackeys. Access to the chamber would only be permitted once the king had dressed. By such measures Henry hoped to enhance his

² Olivier Poncet, *Pomponne de Bellièvre (1529–1607) Un homme d'état au temps des guerres de religion* (Paris: École des chartes, 1998), p. 73.

³ BnF, ms.fr. 15893, fol. 35–6v. Cited by Poncet, *Pomponne de Bellièvre*, p. 74n.

dignity, but they made him unpopular. Several nobles quit the court in disgust, forcing him to backtrack.⁴

Even before arriving in Lyons, Henry rewarded the men who had been with him to Poland. Villequier was appointed First gentleman of the chamber instead of marshal de Retz. This upset Catherine de' Medici who held the latter in high regard. At her request, Henry revised his decision. Villequier and Retz were made to share the office for one semester each. But the queen-mother failed to dissuade Henry from appointing Bellegarde as marshal of France. Beaulieu-Ruzé became one of five secretaries of state. Larchant was appointed as captain of the royal bodyguard (*gardes du corps*) in place of Lansac whom Catherine had appointed, and Souvré was given charge of the wardrobe. These appointments show that Henry intended to be served by men of proven loyalty to himself.

The Midi in Revolt

The most urgent problem facing Henry at his accession was the situation in the Midi which had taken a dangerous turn as a result of Damville's defection. On 10 September 1574, the king issued a declaration 'concerning the return of his subjects to their obedience'. It was addressed to all provincial governors and 'good towns'. Writing to the Parlement, he expressed the wish that 'those who in the past have been taught to view our favour with some distrust should seek it without delay'. Henry almost certainly wanted a general pacification. Writing to the sieur de Languillier on 1 October, he said that his greatest wish was to win his subjects' obedience 'only by gentleness and clemency'. He wanted his reign to be happy and promised to embrace his subjects as a good father does his children if they obeyed his Lyons declaration.⁵ Henry had to back a campaign, launched by his mother and by the majority of his councillors, aimed at forcing Damville and his allies to submit. Four armies had been raised for this purpose. The first, under Montpensier, was active in Poitou. The second under marshal de Retz was in Provence; the third under the Prince-dauphin (Montpensier's son) was assigned the Rhône valley, and the last, under the king himself, was to take on Damville. On 20 September Henry had called on him to surrender the towns he occupied, and on 14 October he ordered him to retire to the court of Savoy without prejudice to his property in France.⁶

⁴ Pierre Champion, *Henri III roi de Pologne*, (Paris, 1951), Vol 2, p. 174.

⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, No. 1048, pp. 24–5.

⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol 2, pp. 14–15,

After meeting Henry in Turin, Damville had returned to Languedoc. He and the king, he said, had parted on good terms, and on 11 October he informed the citizens of Beaucaire that both wanted peace; but his mood soon changed. On 13 November he issued a manifesto blaming foreigners in the king's council for France's troubles. They were accused of preventing the nobility from gaining access to offices and titles. Two royal armies, Damville complained, were being sent to Provence: one under Retz, a foreigner, the other under the duc d'Uzès, a renegade iconoclast. Denying that fear of assassination had driven him to take up arms, Damville explained that he had done so in response to appeals from 'the princes of the blood, officers of the crown and peers of the realm' as well as from French provinces. As an officer of the crown, a native Frenchman and a scion of 'Christians and barons of France', he had felt impelled to seek a remedy for France's current ills.⁷

Damville's manifesto was only one of several similar declarations issued by leaders of the group of noblemen labelled 'Malcontents', who constituted an important new force in the French civil wars. Having been mainly religious so far, they now assumed a more political character. Religion was not forgotten, but many nobles believed that reforming the state was the essential precondition to any religious settlement. Royal patronage, on which so many had come to depend, worked well as long as it was fair, but recent developments had created a climate of favouritism from which many nobles felt excluded. They also resented the place increasingly occupied in the administration by men of the robe. Few nobles of the sword, even those who had been well educated, wished to spend years studying at universities; they considered that they had as much right to hold offices of state as men who had never fought. Lastly, many noble families, especially in the Midi, were split by religion in ways that contradicted traditional ties of kinship, friendship and solidarity. They had grown tired of fighting friends and relations. The siege of La Rochelle may have convinced them that religious conflict was being used by elements at court who were out to destroy France's ancient liberties.⁸

From Lyons, Henry III and his mother travelled to Avignon, where she tried to negotiate with Damville, but, suspecting that she only wanted to detach him from his Huguenot allies, he consolidated his position, called a meeting of the provincial estates and bombarded Saint-Gilles. In the meantime, representatives

⁷ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III* (Paris, 1985), p. 271; Claude Tievant, *Le gouverneur de Languedoc pendant les premières guerres de religion (1559–1574) Henri de Montmorency-Damville* (Paris, 1993), pp. 312–14.

⁸ Arlette Jouanna, *La France du XVI^e siècle*, (Paris, 1996), pp. 495–8.

of the Protestant churches signed a 'treaty of association' with Catholics at Nîmes in which the need for religious toleration was accepted. 'Until such time as God through His grace unites us in religion,' the treaty declared, 'we must each and everyone of us live so that the conscience of each is left at peace ... each in this respect will have complete freedom of conscience so that no one will be debarred from the traditional exercise of his faith ... peacefully and in mutual charity, without incidents or insults'.⁹ In the meantime, the Huguenots of the Midi set up a federal state. The foundations had been laid by a series of political assemblies held in various towns since November 1562. At Millau, in December 1573, a kind of constitution was drawn up, and in July 1574, also at Millau, Condé was chosen as 'governor-general and protector' and Damville as governor and the king's lieutenant-general in Languedoc with responsibility in Condé's absence for 'ensuring the crown's conservation'. The new constitution was not republican. The delegates at Millau vehemently denied that they had ever thought of deserting their natural lord, the king. Their aim, they asserted, was not to create a separate state but to reform the existing one.

Coronation and Marriage

On 10 January 1575 Henry III left Avignon on the first lap of his journey to Rheims. Having failed to impose his authority in the Midi, he suffered a further humiliation outside Livron when a crowd of women hurled abuse at his party from the top of the town walls. Henry needed not only power, but also a wife. As long as he remained single, it was possible that Alençon would seek to replace him on the throne. But who was he to marry? As we have seen, Catherine de' Medici had tried in vain to persuade him to marry the English queen, Elizabeth I. Henry had been much in love with Marie de Clèves, but she had married the prince of Condé and had recently died. So he now suggested Louise de Vaudémont, the beautiful young woman whom he had seen at the court of Lorraine on the eve of his departure for Poland. She was the daughter of Nicolas de Lorraine, count of Vaudémont, and Margaret of Egmont. Sent to the court of Lorraine at the age of 10, she had been brought up by the duchess, Claude. Catherine had at first opposed the idea of Henry marrying Louise who was related to the Guises fearing that this might revive the political influence of the cardinal of Lorraine. She had sent an envoy to Sweden to explore the possibility of Henry marrying the king's sister, but after the cardinal's death in

⁹ Jouanna, *La France du XVI^e siècle*, p. 508.

December 1575, Catherine lifted her objection to Louise. Being only 22 years' old, she was likely to have children. Her temperament also seemed to pose no threat to Catherine's influence at court. So Henry sent Cheverny and Le Guast to Nancy to ask for her hand. Louise received the proposal as she and her parents were on their way to Rheims to attend Henry's coronation! Her acceptance was a foregone conclusion. In the meantime, Henry's Polish subjects wondered about his intentions. A deputation sent by the Polish senate tried in vain to see him in Lyons, but they had to wait till February, once he had reached Dijon, before they were received. 'I owe the crown to God,' he told them, 'and to your own free will, and I do not intend to give it up. As soon as the new queen will give me a son, I will go to Cracow; in the meantime, I will send two important dignitaries to your Diet.' The king's reply seems to have comforted the envoys. Poland could wait for the time being!

Henry arrived in Rheims early on Friday 11 February 1575. After the formal welcome by the mayor and aldermen, he made his way to the cathedral and prayed at the high altar. He then called on his future bride who was already in the city. The coronation or *sacre* followed on Sunday 13 February. The day began as two cardinals escorted Henry to the archbishop's residence where, it is said, he sewed pearls and precious stones on the costume he was to wear at his coronation and also starched his ruff. The ceremony itself lasted five hours during which Henry changed clothes seven times, took an oath three times, and knelt 10 times. Having fasted beforehand, he felt faint at the critical moment. According to L'Estoile, 'when the crown was placed on his head he said rather loudly that it was hurting him, and it slipped twice as if it were about to fall which was noted and interpreted as a bad omen.'¹⁰ Other incidents also blemished the occasion. A quarrel over precedence broke out among princes of the blood and peers; and, for some unknown reason, the *Te Deum* was omitted. This too, was seen as a bad omen.

The king of France in the sixteenth century viewed his authority as 'absolute', for he believed that he had no superior save God whose lieutenant on earth he was deemed to be. His coronation or *sacre* was the ceremonial endorsement of that relationship. It conferred on him a semi-priestly character. He could not celebrate mass, but, unlike the laity, could take communion in both kinds. The *sacre* also conferred on him the miraculous power of healing the sick who, by this time, were restricted to victims of scrofula. The ceremony of the royal touch took place immediately after the coronation at the shrine of Saint Marcoul at

¹⁰ Pierre de L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 1, p. 154.

Corbény. Henry went there, but did not touch anyone. Maybe he felt too tired after the ceremonial he had just endured. It was also rumoured that the Holy Ampula had been found empty.



Figure 7.1 Portrait of Henry III of France (1551–89) by François Quesnel (1543–1616), oil on canvas. Paris: musée du Louvre.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

Henry's coronation was followed almost at once by his marriage. As his mother pointed out in a letter to Bellièvre, the *surintendant des finances*, savings would be made, notably in the distribution of gifts, by combining the king's coronation and wedding.¹¹ The marriage contract was signed on 14 February and the wedding followed next day. De Thou tells us that it was delayed till the

¹¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 5, p. 301.

afternoon because Henry took so long fussing over his attire and that of his bride, but royal weddings always took place then to allow time for the participants to recover from the previous evening's festivities. Henry arrived at Rheims cathedral in pomp preceded by bugles and trumpets. Behind him walked the bride's father, the count of Vaudémont. Louise's cortège followed. Tall and blond, she wore a gown and heavy cope of mauve velvet embroidered with fleurs-de-lys. Her future brothers-in-law, the duc d'Anjou and the king of Navarre, walked on either side of her. Behind came Catherine de' Medici and many princesses and other ladies. For once Catherine had set aside the mourning she had worn since her husband's death in 1559. The wedding itself took place outside the cathedral's main porch under a canopy of gold cloth. It was followed by a low mass within the cathedral celebrated by cardinal de Bourbon and the day was rounded off by a banquet and a ball at the archiepiscopal palace. According to a Venetian witness, the king and 12 princes wore suits of silver cloth adorned with pearls and jewels. The new queen, too, was superbly dressed.¹²

Henry left Rheims on 21 February 1575 and returned to Paris on the 27 February. After paying his respects at the Louvre to Elizabeth, Charles IX's widow, he and the two queens, Louise and Catherine, went to stay with the sieur du Mortier in the district of Les Halles. The king's marriage, by drawing him closer to the Guises, inevitably upset the Huguenots. On 7 April he was reminded of divisions within his kingdom as delegates sent by Condé and Damville arrived in Paris. They were received by Henry in his chamber on the 11 April. Also present were the two queens, Alençon, Navarre and all the privy council. The sieur d'Arènes, speaking for the delegates, said that nothing had pleased Condé more than to learn that the king wanted to pacify the kingdom after taking account of the wishes of all his subjects. Henry replied that he had indeed returned from Poland intending to embrace them all regardless of faith. There would have been no trouble, he said, if only he had been obeyed. The delegates' assurances allowed him to hope that he might, after all, pacify the kingdom. Addressing the queen mother, d'Arènes asked her to bring her influence to bear in favour of peace. She agreed to do so, but added that she would not press her son to accept unreasonable terms. The delegates then withdrew as the king considered their demands: freedom of Protestant worship throughout the kingdom, bipartisan law courts in all the Parlements, surety towns, the release of marshals Montmorency and Cossé, a meeting of the Estates-General, rehabilitation for the victims of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre and punishment of their

¹² Jacqueline Boucher, *Deux épouses et reines à la fin du XVI^e siècle* (Saint-Étienne, 1995), pp. 30–42.

murders. After recalling the delegates, Henry said: 'Your terms seem to me very strange and I am surprised that you have dared to present them to me. They do not match your words and lead me to believe that you do not really want peace.' He told them that he was prepared to offer freedom of worship, but only in the surety towns and in two towns per *gouvernement*. Catherine told the delegates that her son would never revive the Edict of January. Early in June, she rejoiced when told that Damville had died but the report was soon denied: the marshal had only been ill. On 6 June he was well enough to receive the delegates on their return from Paris, whereupon he called an assembly of the Union to consider the king's response. This led to another deputation being sent to him which laid down two essential preconditions for further talks: freedom of Protestant worship throughout France and the release from prison of the two marshals. In the meantime, fighting broke out in many parts of France. Instead of large armies, however, forces of a few thousand men, each under a captain, carried out raids against towns and villages, sprang ambushes and generally caused mayhem in the countryside. Pillage, rape and exacting ransoms became the order of the day. Religion seemed to matter less than paying off old scores or satisfying private ambition or lust.

The Peace of 'Monsieur'

On 13 September François duc d'Alençon, also known as 'Monsieur', the title given to the heir to the throne, fled from the court to Dreux where he issued a manifesto that repeated Damville's demands.¹³ He asked for the removal from court of all foreigners, for a religious settlement pending a church council, and for the Estates-General to be called. The civil war took on a more serious turn as the rebels could now claim legitimacy by virtue of their association with a prince of the blood who assumed the title of 'protector of the liberty and public good of France'. About 1,000 noblemen rallied to Alençon's standard. Henry III suddenly seemed terribly alone. Early in October, an army of 2,000 German *reiters* under John Casimir of the Palatinate invaded Champagne. The alarming prospect of a possible link-up between them and the *Malcontents* in the west and south of France prompted Henry to send his mother on a peace errand. She met Alençon at Chambord in late September. He asked for the release of the two marshals which Henry reluctantly conceded. Peace, however, depended on Catherine agreeing to more demands. Eventually, on 21 November 1575,

¹³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 1, p. 201.

a seven months' truce was signed at Champigny. Alençon was promised five towns as security for the truce, while Condé was promised Mézières. Freedom of worship was granted to Huguenots in towns they already held and in two others per *gouvernement*. The *reiters* were promised 500,000 *livres* provided they remained east of the Rhine. Catherine's hope that the truce would lead to a lasting peace was soon dashed, however.¹⁴ The governors of Angoulême and Bourges refused to hand over their offices to Alençon. Nor could he control the actions of Condé and John Casimir. On 10 October part of the latter's forces had been defeated by the duc de Guise at Dormans, but on 9 January 1576 more than 25,000 German troops invaded France, taking Henry completely by surprise. The defences of Paris were strengthened and an army assembled at Gien under his command. The rest, under Guise's brother, the duc de Mayenne, stood by at Vitry-le-François. But the royal troops – unpaid, unfed and in rags – could only shadow John Casimir's army as it marched south, reaching Dijon on 31 January 1576 and Moulins on 4 March.

Catherine hoped that Alençon would stay neutral, but he joined the invaders. The truce of Champigny was not being observed. Most of the towns he had been promised refused to admit his men. In December, he accused the chancellor, Birague, of trying to poison him. He demanded an enquiry and an end to Italian domination of the crown.¹⁵ Evidence of poisoning could not be found, but many people suspected that an Italian faction at court, supported by the Guises, were bent on wrecking the truce. The English ambassador confirmed this in a letter to Walsingham.¹⁶ On 25 January Morosini reported: 'The cardinals of Guise and Este, the dukes of Nemours, Guise, and Nevers, the chancellor, marshal de Retz and Messieurs Morvillier and Cheverny have banded together in a league to accept neither peace nor a treaty.'¹⁷ Alençon, outraged by the alleged attempt to poison him, threatened to call in the *reiters* to rid the kingdom of the crown's enemies. Henry faced a dire situation. The large Protestant army, encamped in Lorraine near the French border, consisted of 9,000 German *reiters*, 8,000 Swiss mercenaries, 2,000 German foot and 1,000 Walloon foot. And Alençon seemed about to join them. On 5 February 1576 Henri de Navarre fled from the court to the town of Alençon in Normandy within the duke's apanage. He promptly reverted to the Calvinist faith and, retiring to his lands in the south-west, began

¹⁴ Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 59; Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 305–18.

¹⁵ BnF, ms.fr. 6547, ff. 35–7.

¹⁶ *Cal. State Papers, Foreign*, Vol. xi, p. 233.

¹⁷ BnF, ms.ital. 1729, ff. 447–9.

raising an army.¹⁸ 'One can safely say,' Morosini declared, 'that the king is now left completely alone, with the princes of the blood and nearly all the French nobility allied with his brother.'¹⁹ On 19 February a delegation representing Alençon, Navarre, Condé and Damville arrived at court with a list of 93 demands. In addition to the free exercise of the Protestant faith throughout the kingdom, they asked for bi-partisan courts in the various parlements, a number of fortified towns and payment of the *reiters*. In addition, Alençon asked for the duchy of Anjou to be added to his apanage; Navarre for more rights and privileges for his lands in Guyenne and Condé demanded the town and château of Boulogne.²⁰

In March, after Alençon and Condé had joined forces at Moulins, Casimir began to march on Paris with his *reiters*. Navarre, whose forces were camped in Poitou, planned to join them after crossing the Loire at Saumur. On 9 April Alençon declared, 'We have decided to exploit the means that God has given us to win by force the peace and tranquillity that we could not achieve with reason.'²¹ Henry and Catherine seemed to have no choice but surrender. For two weeks they considered the rebels' demands. After leaving Paris on 26 April, Catherine met them at Étigny, near Sens, and told them that Henry accepted nearly all their demands except one. At first, he would not allow the Protestants freedom of worship within a radius of 10 leagues from Paris, but eventually he had to settle for two. The edict of pacification, officially known as the Edict of Beaulieu, which resulted from the talks was published at Étigny and Sens on 6 May and registered by the Parlement on 14 May. It became known as the 'Peace of Monsieur' because contemporaries rightly assumed that it had been forced on the king by Alençon. Its preface expressed Henry's wish to reconcile his subjects 'in a perfect union and concord and to restore them in peace, tranquillity and repose'. Catholicism was to be restored in areas where it had been banned by the Huguenots. They were also to observe Catholic feast-days, but the edict was mainly favourable to the Protestants. Their faith was henceforth to be referred to as the '*Religion prétendue réformée*' and, for the first time, they were granted the right to worship anywhere in France except at court and within two leagues of Paris. They were allowed to build churches or *temples* almost anywhere and admitted to all professions, schools and hospitals. Also for the first time, lawcourts, comprising judges of both religions, were to be set up in every

¹⁸ James B. Wood, *The King's Army* (Cambridge, 1996), p.36; *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, ed. Laurent Bourquin (Paris, 2003), Vol. 3, p. 262.

¹⁹ BnF, ms.ital. 1729, ff. 471–2. Cited by Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 62.

²⁰ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 62.

²¹ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 65.

parlement. The massacre of St. Bartholomew was condemned as a crime and its victims, including Coligny, were rehabilitated. The Huguenots were given eight surety towns: two each in Languedoc, Guyenne, Dauphiné and Provence. A meeting of the Estates-General was to be called within six months. Secret articles rewarded the rebels. Alençon added Anjou, Touraine and Berry to his apanage and assumed the title of duc d'Anjou. Condé and Damville resumed their governorships of Picardy and Languedoc respectively. John Casimir was given the duchy of Étampes. Navarre's governorship of Guyenne was confirmed and extended to cover Poitou and Angoumois.²²

The Edict of Beaulieu proved extremely unpopular in Paris and among Catholics in general. The Parlement would only register it after a *lit-de-justice*. On 14 May, according to l'Estoile: 'the king came to the Palais accompanied by the princes of the blood and the officers of the crown and the edict of pacification was recognized and published in his presence before the court assembled in red robes'. Afterwards Henry planned to attend a *Te Deum* at Notre-Dame followed by bonfires in the capital, but the clergy and the people were so furious that neither could take place. Next day, however, *Te Deum* was sung at Notre-Dame in Henry's presence. It was performed by the choir of his own chapel as the cathedral's choir would not take part. Only a few people watched in silence a bonfire outside the Hotel de Ville.²³ On 7 June, the king returned to the Parlement for publication of the edict creating a new bi-partisan court. 'This was so odious to the court,' writes l'Estoile, 'that if the king had not come there in person, it would never have been published.'²⁴ In the meantime, on 18 May, about 50 *Malcontents* signed an agreement to uphold the peace, but this was beyond them. Some fortified towns refused to admit Protestant garrisons as they were required to do. Nor did Henry and his mother do much to enforce the peace. Several months later, Catherine, writing to the duc de Nevers, said that she and her son 'had made the peace in order to get back Monsieur, not to re-establish the Huguenots, as everybody now realizes.'²⁵ Henry said much the same in a letter to the sieur d'Abain in January 1577.²⁶

²² André Stegmann (ed.) *Édits des guerres de religion* (Paris, 1979), pp. 97–120; N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 228–31, 361–2; *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, Vol. 3, pp. 288–306.

²³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 2, p. 31; *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, Vol. 3, p. 307.

²⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 2, p. 33.

²⁵ *Recueil des pièces originales et authentiques concernant la tenue des Etats Généraux*, ed. Lalourcé and Duval (Paris, 1789), Vol. 3, p. 18; Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 69.

²⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, pp. 135–8.

The 'Mignons'

From the start of his reign, Henry III associated with a group of young men, roughly of his own age, who shared his interests and tastes. Jules Gassot in his memoirs writes: 'It was at this time (late 1577) that the king began to have near his person certain lords and noblemen whom he liked and were known as the *mignons*.'²⁷ Writing to Henri de Saint-Sulpice in March 1576, Henry referred to them as 'my troop' (*ma troupe*).²⁸ Soon after his return from Poland he associated mainly with men who had shared his experiences in that country. Marguerite de Valois describes in her memoirs how Henry went about the streets of Lyons with a few close friends: d'O, Ruffec, Caylus, Entraguet and Le Guast.²⁹ But it was only in 1575 that they became a recognizable group known as the king's *mignons*. They ensured that he did not feel isolated in a court that was becoming increasingly difficult to control on account of its enormous size and the rival factions it contained. The *mignons* also helped to strengthen the king's authority by showing the benefits to be gained from his favour.³⁰

Claude Haton, in his memoirs, calls the *mignons* 'men risen from rather lowly families'. They were also suspect to some people, as they came mostly from peripheral French provinces, like Gascony or Languedoc. Yet there was nothing unusual in their rise which followed the pattern of noble families linked by marriage bettering themselves locally over several generations. Nor did Henry favour certain provinces more than others in choosing his companions. If relatively few came from central France, they all came from provinces within the kingdom. Most belonged to the service nobility Catherine de' Medici had employed in the first decade of the religious wars. Three (Henri de Saint-Sulpice, Louis de Maugiron and Anne de Joyeuse) were the sons of prominent members of her administration. Foremost among Henry's companions on his return from Poland were Charles de Balsac, also known as Entraguet, Henri de Saint-Sulpice and Jacques de Lévis-Caylus. Balsac belonged to a family well-established in the Massif Central. Born around 1547, he had entered Henry's household by 1571, soon becoming a gentleman of the chamber. He was supported by his brothers and by the families of Humières and Guise who led the Catholic party. Saint-Sulpice belonged to an important family of Upper-Quercy. In the early religious

²⁷ Jules Gassot, *Sommaire mémorial (souvenirs) de Jules Gassot, secrétaire du roi (1555–1623)*, ed. Pierre Champion (Paris, 1934), pp. 149–50.

²⁸ E. Cabié (ed.) *Guerres de religion dans le Sud-Ouest de la France* (Albi, 1906), p. 293.

²⁹ *Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois*, ed. Y. Cazaux (Paris, 1986), p. 66.

³⁰ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seysssel, 2000), p. 211.

wars, his father, Jean, had been the prototype of royal servants formed by Montmorency and taken over later by Catherine de' Medici. The third member of the group, Lévis-Caylus, belonged to one of the most prestigious families of the Massif Central. He met the future Henry III when he was 18 and followed him to Poland, becoming a gentleman of his chamber. Far from being *parvenus*, these young men belonged to ancient families that had served the crown since the late XVth century.³¹ Their elevation was part of a royal strategy aimed at strengthening the networks of *fidélité* over which their parents presided. Several came from Guyenne and a region south of the Massif central where Protestants had a significant military presence. The king needed to control it. Jean de Saint-Sulpice, the father of Henri, helped to enforce the edicts of pacification. In 1579 he also accompanied the queen-mother on her mission to the king of Navarre. In Rouergue, Antoine de Caylus, the father of Jacques, played a similar role. In November 1573 he was sent to persuade Montmorency-Damville to contain the Protestants of the Midi. Maugiron's father was Henry III's main representative in Dauphiné. As military commanders, the *mignons* were expected to raise troops in their native provinces. In 1578–79, Henry renewed his chief representatives in the provinces, and in the 1580s he set out to marginalize the Guises by appointing *mignons* to governorships and other important provincial posts as they fell vacant. Their rise was part of a policy of strengthening the ties between the central government and provincial nobility.

The younger members of Henry's 'troop' received their military training at court before his departure for Poland. After arriving in Paris in November 1566, Saint-Sulpice and two of his brothers entered the collège de Navarre. A month later he was introduced to the future Henry III by his father, but it was in the household of the duc d'Alençon, also known as 'Monsieur', that he and his brothers learned to ride, fence and play the lute. In return for this training, they were expected to entertain the prince. In September 1571 Saint-Sulpice attended his first ball. In addition to being where a young man learnt to be an aristocrat, the court offered him opportunities to form social relationships and to attach himself to a patron who might eventually find him a government post. He entered Alençon's household in March 1570 as one of eight *gentilhommes ordinaires* who were paid an annual wage of 500 *livres*. In 1575 he became a *chambellan*. But Saint-Sulpice and his brothers seemed driven by a sense of loyalty to Henry, the future king.

All the nobles who surrounded Henry III at his accession had been members of his household in Poland. This was true of Henri de Saint-Sulpice, Jacques

³¹ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 213–19.

de Lévis-Caylus, François de Saint Luc, François d'O, Charles de Balsac (Entraguet) and Paul de Saint-Mégrin. On their return to France, they were integrated into the king's household as *échansons*. Only three were gentlemen of the chamber. The rest were promoted within two years. In 1576–77 they were all *gentilhommes* receiving an annual wage of 600 *livres*. Within this first group, d'O, Saint-Luc and Saint-Mégrin rose faster than the rest. They were the first *mignons* to be given military or provincial commands in addition to court offices thereby exemplifying Henry III's aim of creating a nobility tied exclusively to his person and capable of serving him far beyond the court.³²

Saint-Luc was seen by the writer, Brantôme, as the ideal soldier-courtier.³³ He belonged to an old Norman family that had served the crown for two generations. Following Henry's accession, Saint-Luc became an *échanson*, then a knight of the order of St. Michael and a gentleman of the chamber. The king favoured him particularly in 1577 and 1578. He called him '*le petiot*'. In 1579 he bought for him the château of Beaulieu, near Rosay-en-Brie, much to the disgust of Claude Haton, who was shocked that the king should be giving to his favourites property taken from his subjects.³⁴ The rise of François d'O, another Norman, was, along with Saint-Luc's, the most spectacular among the *mignons* of the 1570s. In addition to becoming Master of the wardrobe and a First gentleman of the chamber, d'O commanded a company of troops and was lieutenant-general of Normandy. Known as a violent man, he instigated the murder of a Huguenot nobleman in August 1575 and may have been partly responsible for Entraguet's fall.³⁵ Among the second generation of *mignons*, the most remarkable was Paul de Saint-Mégrin, whose family, based in Saintonge, had served the crown since the Hundred Years' War. Having inherited a vast landed fortune, Saint-Mégrin joined the court soon after Henry III's accession becoming a *Gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre* in 1578, then a captain of *gendarmes* and camp master of light cavalry.³⁶

Marguerite de Navarre states in her *Memoirs* that the king systematically set about detaching members of the household of his brother, the duc d'Alençon.³⁷ Henri de Saint-Sulpice, Louis de Maugiron, Guy de Livarot, and later Gilles de Souvré and Jean-Louis de La Valette, were all taken from there. After recruiting

³² Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 222.

³³ Pierre de Bourdeille, sieur de Brantôme, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Ludovic Lalanne (Paris, 1864–1882), Vol. III, p. 81.

³⁴ *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, Vol. 4, p. 188.

³⁵ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 225–7.

³⁶ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 227–9.

³⁷ *Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois*, p. 119.

Saint-Sulpice, Henry targeted Maugiron, who had been Alençon's chamberlain in 1576. He belonged to an important family of Dauphiné where his father had fought the Huguenots. His cousin, Livarot, who also belonged to an old family of Dauphiné, joined the royal circle at the same time. He began his career as an *écuyer d'écurie* in Alençon's household. It was around 1576 that Henry set about detaching from it Maugiron and Livarot. Maugiron became a gentleman of his chamber in that year and Livarot around 1577.³⁸

Another group of persons with whom Henry III had more formal relations included Philibert de Gramont, François d'Aydie de Ribérac and the Schomberg brothers. Gramont became a courtier mainly on account of his father who had given loyal service in Béarn. He became a captain of *gendarmes*, a knight of the Order of St. Michael and a *Gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre*. Ribérac, also from Béarn, became one by 1576. The Schombergs were originally from Saxony in Germany. Gaspard de Schomberg had fought the Turks in Hungary under the duc de Guise. As a diplomat he wore himself out on missions to and from Germany. He accompanied Henry to Poland in 1573. As a naturalized Frenchman, he became a gentleman of the king's chamber in 1570, a chamberlain in 1571, a knight of St. Michael and a *conseiller d'État* in 1573 and a marshal in charge of *reiters*.³⁹

Henry III consolidated his circle of *mignons* by arranging marriages for them. Thus, in February 1576, Henri de Saint-Sulpice married Catherine de Carmaing, a wealthy heiress from south-west France. Following her husband's death in 1577, the king tried to marry her off to another *mignon* – perhaps Saint-Luc – but she resisted his pressure and married someone outside the circle of royal favourites. In February 1578, another *mignon*, Saint-Luc married Jeanne, the daughter of marshal Cossé-Brissac, a family closely associated with the duc d'Alençon. She had been promised to the comte de La Roche-Guyon who consequently turned against the king. As a marriage-broker, Henry favoured members of his entourage at the expense of other noblemen. He evidently intended Saint-Luc's marriage to draw his powerful lineage closer to the crown. He also arranged the marriage of François d'O to Charlotte-Catherine, the daughter of René de Villequier.⁴⁰

It was after the peace of Beaulieu (May 1576), that Henry III's *mignons* first attracted public notice. The Venetian ambassador, Lippomano mentions 'eighteen or twenty of His Majesty's favourites who, in French, are called *mignons*' and L'Estoile in his *Journal* describes Henry III's arrival at Ollainville

³⁸ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 229–33.

³⁹ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 234–7.

⁴⁰ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 237–44.

on 20 October 1577 accompanied by 'the troop of his young *mignons*'.⁴¹ They were soon abused in a pamphlet entitled *Les mignons de l'an 1577* that was widely circulated.⁴² In fifteenth-century France the word '*mignon*', meant simply 'companion'. It only took on a pejorative meaning about the mid-sixteenth century. Historians in the nineteenth century, brainwashed by Bourbon propaganda, viewed Henry III's *mignons* as 'miserable wretches who presided in his licentious court over mysteries worthy of Nero and Heliogabalus'. Their lives were described as 'a mix of unspeakable debauchery, *capucinades* and sword blows'. Lavissee in his famous *History of France* accused them of destroying Henry's virility. A younger generation of historians have been less severe.

In 1576 the French court began to split up into factions or groups following a leader. The two main factions were those around the king and his brother, François, duc d'Anjou. They soon came to blows. The first victim was Le Guast. On the eve of the feast of All Saints, he was sitting at home, having his toe nails cut by a servant, when a troop of armed men burst into the room and stabbed him to death. As he lay dying, he said that he had recognized Guillaume du Prat, baron de Vitteaux, one of Anjou's clients, among his assailants. L'Estoile thought Le Guast had been murdered because of his pride and open contempt for Anjou. A contemporary text described him as a man who spent his life like a peacock admiring his own tail. He had been used by the king, it seems, to detach members of Anjou's household. It was Le Guast who had been ordered by Henry to prevent Anjou's flight from court on 15 September 1575. De Thou believed that he had antagonized great nobles by treating them as social inferiors. Henry gave him a splendid funeral at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois but never tried to prosecute his murderers. He may have been glad to be rid of a man who had become a political embarrassment to him.⁴³

In the summer of 1576, according to L'Estoile, 'the name of *mignons* began to be spoken by the people who regarded them as odious'.⁴⁴ They were scandalized by events at court, notably the murder of Françoise de La Marck by her husband René de Villequier in September 1577 when the court was at Poitiers.⁴⁵ Villequier stabbed his wife as she lay in bed. After the crime had been considered by the *Prévôt de l'hôtel*, Villequier received a royal pardon on the grounds that his wife was loose and had tried to poison him. Villequier's

⁴¹ N. Tommaseo (ed.), *Relations des ambassadeurs vénitiens sur les affaires de France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1838), Vol. II, p. 349.

⁴² L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. II, p. 145.

⁴³ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 368–71.

⁴⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. II, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, p. 269.

daughter declared that 'the king's favour was then entirely for the said sieur de Villequier'. Public opinion was outraged that the murder of a pregnant woman in the king's own lodging should go unpunished. A servant who had been so terrified by Villequier's violence had thrown herself out of a window injuring herself. A rumour soon spread that Henry III had been the victim's lover with her husband's consent and had ordered her murder after she had spoken ill of him. He certainly did not mourn her loss. Writing to Souvré, he called her a whore ('*putain de fame*') and congratulated Villequier for getting rid of her.⁴⁶

The *mignons* were not merely decorative. They were actively engaged in various military and administrative tasks. Writing to the king in October 1579, Catherine de' Medici praised Saint-Luc who had acted as her go-between with the court. Several *mignons* commanded infantry regiments while others were captains of *compagnies d'ordonnance*. In November 1575 La Guiche was appointed as camp master of the light cavalry doubtless to counter the authority of the duc de Guise, its colonel-general. It was in the autumn of 1575 that the *mignons* as a 'troop' first took part in a major military operation. They were sent to Langres to stop the advance of John-Casimir's *reiters*. On 10 October they were present at the battle of Dormans. In 1577 several accompanied Anjou on his campaign against Huguenot strongholds in central France. Maugiron lost an eye at Issoire. In July, La Guiche and Caylus were captured by the Huguenots near Brouage. In 1580, as the Protestant captain Aspremont was about to engage Livarot's regiment, he called out to his men: 'let us charge them, they are court *mignons*!' The last military operation in which the *mignons* fought as a group was the siege of La Fère in the summer of 1580. Their departure prompted the publication of several satirical pamphlets pointing to their lack of experience. Contemporaries were also highly critical of the large sums given to them by the king to help pay for their equipment. D'Aubigné denounced the comfort they enjoyed during the siege, calling it 'the velvet siege', yet some 2,000 royal troops were killed and as many died of disease. But if the *mignons* fought like other noblemen, they were certainly privileged by being placed at the heart of the army.

In the last years of Charles IX's reign, most royal representatives were appointed by Catherine de' Medici. Hardly any were appointed at the start of Henry III's reign. It was only in the 1577 that the real process of appointing members of his entourage to provincial governorships began in earnest. The king aimed to assure himself of key regions and at the same time legitimize the role played by his favourites in the public sphere as representatives of the crown. Saint-Luc became governor of Brouage in February 1579. He did not come from

⁴⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. II, p. 127–8.

that region so his appointment points to a new policy of planting members of the king's entourage in provinces where they had no existing ties. Saint-Luc did not find his new role easy. François d'O had an easier time as governor of Lower Normandy as he came from there. René de Villequier became governor of Paris and the Île-de-France about the same time. As such, he could attend debates in the Parlement and acted as the king's go-between with the Parisian authorities. In February 1583 he attended debates in the municipal assembly regarding a royal demand for 200,000 *livres*. Villequier was also responsible for keeping order in the capital and organizing ceremonies aimed at glorifying the monarch.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 314–36.

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Chapter 8

Henry III, the Man

Henry III has been badly served by historians. In the seventeenth century they set out to magnify Henry IV, the first Bourbon monarch, by denigrating his Valois predecessor. Hardouin de Péréfixe, future archbishop of Paris and a former tutor of Louis XIV, was largely responsible for the black legend of Henry III. In his *Histoire du roy Henry le Grand* (Paris, 1661), he denounced the weakness and laziness, the odious luxury, the idleness, the frivolous and puerile pursuits of the last Valois, pitting them against the male virtues of Henry IV. 'He seemed devoid of heart and movement,' he wrote. 'His only actions consisted of burdening his subjects with new taxes whose produce served merely to enrich his favourites.' The black legend continued to hold sway with nineteenth-century historians. By placing too much reliance on hostile contemporary sources, they concocted a caricature of Henry III at once repellent and grotesque. At the same time, they were puzzled as to how such a being could have produced sensible policies. Had they consulted the archives, they would have become aware that, in his own day, Henry had admirers as well as enemies. Jacqueline Boucher, the present editor of Henry III's voluminous correspondence, describes him as 'a well-organized sovereign of exceptional intelligence, well-informed on all state affairs and anxious to solve all the problems that faced him'.¹ It was on account of his personal qualities that he was offered the Polish crown and impressed people at the Imperial court and in Venice on his way home from Poland. In 1585 the Dutch liked him well enough to think of him as a possible sovereign. That is not to say that Henry was faultless. Like most people, he combined qualities and faults. He was intelligent, witty, hard-working, eloquent, courteous, fastidious and cultured, but also moody, introspective, proud, vindictive and stubborn.

¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7 (2012), p. xii.



Figure 8.1 Drawing of Henry III by Jean Decourt or Étienne Dumonstier (c.1576). More portraits exist of Henry III than of any of his predecessors. He kept a close watch on how he was portrayed. Note the Polish-style bonnet.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Kings in the sixteenth century were commonly judged by their physical appearance. A portrait of Henry about the time of his accession is of a personable young man with a thoughtful, rather melancholic, expression. An Italian, who saw him in Venice, described him as ‘taller than normal with a head more Spanish than French and of a somewhat pallid complexion’.² Brantôme surmised that he had inherited his mother’s beautiful hands.³ But a combination of poor health and

² E. Charrière, *Négociations de la France dans le Levant* (1848–60), Vol. 3, p. 545.

³ Pierre de Bourdeille, sieur de Brantôme, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. L. Lalanne (Paris, 1864–82), Vol. 7, pp. 342–3.

huge worries caused Henry to age prematurely.⁴ A portrait of him in his thirties shows harder features and an attire simpler than before. In another portrait, drawn in his late thirties, Henry has grown a beard. He looks deeply worried and no longer caring about his appearance. These impressions find confirmation in contemporary diplomatic dispatches. In 1582 a Venetian writes of Henry's poor health and fragile complexion.⁵ Four years later, René de Lucinge describes him as prematurely old and almost completely white. He had also put on weight, yet, according to the chancellor, Cheverny, always retained his excellent manners and imposing presence. 'This prince,' he wrote, 'was very well-born. He had a fine presence and stature, a countenance and gravity worthy of and suited to his greatness ... his speech was soft and very agreeable ... he never swore or spoke offensively to anyone.'⁶ Yet Henry did sometimes lose his temper. He kicked the backside of Henri de Mesmes, the queen's chancellor, and, on another occasion, drew his sword during a council meeting on one of its members.⁷

Henry was hardly ever in good health.⁸ In 1575 a Venetian reported that the king suffered from chronic indigestion and had been advised to drink only wine rather than water.⁹ On 12 March another Italian reported that piles had obliged Henry to stay in bed for several days. In June a nasal abscess that had plagued him in childhood reappeared accompanied by a fever. His doctors thought of reopening a diversionary abscess in his arm. In February 1576 a rectal abscess caused Henry more suffering. In 1579 he almost died of an ear infection. 'On Wednesday, second day of September,' writes L'Estoile, 'the king suffered pain in one ear which caused people to fear as King Francis II had died of the same thing. The pain recurred two or three times that day.'¹⁰ Panic spread at court and prayers for the king's recovery were ordered in all the religious houses of Paris. Catherine de' Medici, who was in the south of France, was alerted. Surgery was being considered when the abscess burst of its own accord. Even so, the king's doctors

⁴ René de Lucinge, 'Le miroir des princes ou Grands de la France' in *Annuaire-bulletin de la société d'histoire de France*, 1954–55, p. 104.

⁵ E. Albèri (ed.), *Les relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti* (Florence, 1860) Series 1, Vol. 4, pp. 423 sq.

⁶ Jacqueline Boucher, *Société et mentalités autour de Henri III* (Paris, 2007), p. 13.

⁷ Abel Desjardins (ed.), *Négociations de la France avec la Toscane*, (Paris, 1865–72), Vol. IV, p. 417.

⁸ Jacqueline Boucher, *La cour de Henri III* (Rennes, 1986), pp. 13–16.

⁹ Nicolo Tommaseo, *Relations des ambassadeurs vénitiens sur les affaires de France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1838), Vol. 2, pp. 235–7.

¹⁰ Pierre de L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 3, pp. 46–7.

decided to create a diversionary abscess in his right arm and recommended that he should always keep his head covered. On 25 December 1580 a Tuscan envoy reported that an abscess in one of Henry's legs had healed only to reappear on his face as a cluster of pimples. He identified the trouble as 'the French disease' or syphilis, but this diagnosis, common at the time, cannot be taken seriously. The abscesses which plagued Henry in various parts of his body throughout his life were almost certainly tubercular in origin. He also probably suffered from gout, a common complaint at the time. In June 1579, he wrote to Villeroy: 'I have a pain in my left foot which prevents me from sleeping till around midnight. It is a foolish complaint, as I am very well otherwise ... Farewell, I am eating like a wolf'.¹¹ On 14 May 1584 a Tuscan reported: 'As the trouble that the king has in his foot has not been cured ... he has been ordered by his doctors to put it into the jaw of a recently killed ox'. Not surprisingly, Henry did not hold the medical profession in high regard. Writing to Souvré in 1577, he said: 'I pray God to remove you from the hands of those wretched doctors (*fâcheux médecins*) ... I do not know how else to call them'.¹² In October 1582 he called his principal doctor an 'ignoramus'.

Medical treatment in the sixteenth century was primitive. Bleeding was advocated by an Italian surgeon, called Botalli, who published a treatise on the subject.¹³ Henry was among his first patients. On 16 April 1578 Saint-Sulpice was told that, 'His Majesty was bled last Saturday to cure an itch. This was done by the chancellor's surgeon as he did not trust his own doctors. On returning to this town, the surgeon said that he did not like the blood he had taken from him'. Henry was above all fearful of the stone which, in his day, was usually fatal. Rather than face surgery, he took the waters. In 1580 he and his queen began taking them at Pougues or Bourbon-Lancy. On 5 October 1582 Henry was reported to have taken the waters only to be disappointed: he still had an abscess in one ear and an eye, and now another in his hands. Three days later, the Tuscan ambassador wrote that Henry had a ganglion on his head which he was keeping secret. The waters of Spa were popular at this time. As the spring lay outside France, they were brought by mule train to Mézières so that Henry might drink them without leaving his kingdom. On 12 July he wrote from there to Villeroy: 'I am very well. I have reached one hundred ounces. For the past two

¹¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 4, pp. 231–2, No. 3426.

¹² Baguenot de Puchesse, 'Vingt-quatre lettres de Henri III à Gilles de Souvré' in *Annuaire bulletin de la Société d'histoire de France* 1919, p. 142, No. XIV.

¹³ I. Botalli, *De curatione per sanguinis missionem, ... et hirundinum applicandarum modo* (Lyons, 1577).

days I have been vomiting much mucous and many feathers; I go to the stool and have passed so much urine that I cannot think there is much badness left in my body. I only wish my affairs were as well as my body.’¹⁴ Two days later, however, he wrote: ‘This time I have been put to the test. God knows how I have got over it! Even now I am stunned. Never have I been in so much pain and for two hours. Spa may suit some people but it has left me feeling very drunk. Oh! What pain, Villeroy! It was worse than torture, I think.’¹⁵

Everyone who came into contact with Henry was struck by his lively intelligence. Thirty years after his death, one of his secretaries, Jules Gassot, remembered his ‘excellent memory and divine understanding’. Jacques Amyot, who had taught him as a child, thought no pupil of his had ever shown more aptitude to become ‘a very learned man.’¹⁶ Unfortunately Henry’s education was interrupted at the age of 16 when he was appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom. He regretted this after his election to the Polish throne when he had to ask his chancellor and doctor to reply to Polish ambassadors who had addressed him in Latin. Following his return to France in 1574, he resumed his studies. He picked as tutors Claude Dorron and Jacques Davy du Perron. The former was given the title of *lecteur ordinaire du roi* and the latter of *professeur aux langues, mathématiques et philosophie*. Henry was especially interested in memory. He asked Giordano Bruno if it was natural or acquired by magic. Several works on the subject, including Bruno’s *De Umbris Idearum*, were dedicated to him.¹⁷

Henry was an avid reader. Many books were dedicated to him, but he acquired others himself. An English ambassador reported early in his reign that Henry, accompanied by his young queen, would go to the university and buy books. Somewhat later a Venetian envoy reported that the king often visited shops selling books in the long gallery of the Palais de Justice. During his Venetian visit Henry asked the poet Desportes to give him some books which he had just bought for 500 *écus*. He willingly sought advice as to what he should read. The king also gave books. When he left Paris after the Day of Barricades (see below p. 254), he left many personal possessions, including books, at the Louvre. Some months later, the Leaguers sold them. One, purchased by Pierre de L’Estoile, contained a note in Henry’s own hand recording how it had been dedicated to him. Henry IV bought a precious fourteenth century Bible containing a note written by Henry III. His library was thus broken up and dispersed. Many of his

¹⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, p. 92, No. 4960.

¹⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, pp. 92–3, No. 4961.

¹⁶ Boucher, *La cour de Henri III*, p. 21.

¹⁷ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 35.

books may have been destroyed; others may have lost their bindings. About 171 have survived and are now to be found in libraries across the world. They tell us about the king's love of books. He was fond of handsome bindings adorned with symbols that were sometimes rather macabre.¹⁸ Three languages – Latin, Italian and French – were represented among Henry's books, but not Spanish. Forty three per cent of his books were religious. The rest included many political and historical works. The memoirs of Philippe de Commynes doubtless offered useful tips about how to deal with current political problems. The king was interested in humanism, the classics, contemporary literature, philosophy and archeology. Books concerning the art of war and aristocratic exercises show that he remained interested in the education of a nobleman. Among purely literary works the *Roman de la rose* stands as proof that Henry shared contemporary tastes. Among ancient authors he liked Virgil especially. He also owned a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Religious polemic was not represented in the king's library. Henry evidently felt sure of his faith and did not want it questioned. He made this clear to Duplessis-Mornay, so-called 'Pope of the Huguenots' who said that he had tried in vain for 12 years to become a Catholic. Henry replied that he had perhaps tried too hard, adding that the subject did not interest him. Works by the late sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican, Luis of Granada, loomed large in his library. Indebted as he was to Savonarola and Erasmus, he stressed the importance of the inner religious life. In this respect, Henry was more susceptible to foreign novelties than Parisian Catholics, whose piety was gallican and hostile to novelties.¹⁹

Henry III was not content simply to read contemporary works, he was keen to promote lively discussions among their authors on a variety of topics. Sometimes the discussions turned into poetry competitions in which he was not averse to taking part. He is known to have composed elegiac verses following the assassination of du Guast, the first of his *mignons* to meet a violent death. As more deaths of close friends followed, so did poetic outbursts. Bertaut and Du Perron were commissioned to write verses following the death of the duc de Joyeuse in 1587 which were read aloud to the king and his entourage. The grandest of these poetic jousts was organized by Henry III after the famous 'duel of the *mignons*' in 1578 (see below p. 165). Ronsard, Desportes, A. Jamyn, Passerat, J. Blanchon and Fl. de Birague competed with each other in expressing the king's

¹⁸ Fabienne Le Bars, 'Les reliures de Henri III: essai de typologie' in *Henri III mécène des arts, des sciences et des lettres*, ed. Isabelle de Conihout, Jean-François Maillard and Guy Poirier (Paris, 2006), pp. 227–47.

¹⁹ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 654–77.

grief. Their literary excesses sometimes prompted sniggering rather than tears among their listeners. Ronsard was more successful than others in his flights of fancy. Friendship was another theme that loomed large in poetry competitions, as did loyalty to the king. Some poetic contests turned into satirical burlesques. A collection of epigrams by various poets ridiculing the principal of the collège de Clermont in Auvergne was read aloud to the king for his entertainment.

Henry III liked to hear conflicting views on a variety of philosophical topics. In so doing he was reviving the kind of discussions that had taken place around Francis I's table earlier in the century. From the start of his reign, Henry organized discussions focusing on subjects of his choice. A Venetian ambassador reported on 3 February 1576 that regular meetings were taking place at court that involved its members as well as Parisian intellectuals. They soon became known as the *Académie du palais* (Palace Academy) and were even given statutes by the king. Financial support was offered by the dukes of Retz and Joyeuse among other courtiers. Academies had existed in Italy for more than a century. Carlo Borromeo had founded one at Casale and the poet, Bartolommeo del Bene, who was well-known to Henry, belonged to a Florentine academy. Members of such bodies were not passive listeners, but active participants. The academy founded by Jean Antoine de Baïf in Paris under Charles IX was quite different: the public attended musical performances that had been prepared in advance and rehearsed. Henry's Palace Academy was closer to the Italian model. In January 1576 he took to retiring twice a week after lunch to listen to lectures. By so doing he departed from the normal courtly etiquette of holding a daily audience and missed some council meetings. This met with disapproval in some quarters. The lectures, which lasted three years, were intended to complete the king's education. They were held in his *cabinet* or study on the third floor of the Louvre, a small room, unlit by natural light. Attendance was by invitation only. Some meetings were held at Henry's rural retreat at Ollainville. The Academy brought together leading writers and scholars, including Ronsard, Guy Du Faur de Pibrac, Claude Dorron, Pontus de Tyard, Jean-Antoine de Baïf and Philippe Desportes. Others, who attended from time to time, were Simon Fizes, baron de Sauve, Amadis Jamyn the courtier poet, two physicians, Marc Miron and Filippo Cavriana, and Agrippa d'Aubigné. They were joined by members of the court, including the king's half-brother, Henri d'Angoulême, known as the *Grand Prieur*, the duc de Nevers, the king's sister, Marguerite, Claude-Catherine, comtesse de Retz, Henriette de Clèves, duchesse de Nevers and Louise de Cabriane de la Guyonnière. Later invitees included the Italian humanist, Bartolomeo Delbene, and Jacques Davy Du Perron. The purpose of the meetings

was to equip the king intellectually and morally for kingship. La Primaudaye, in his *Académie française*, reminded Henry that ‘republics are blessed only if kings philosophize or if philosophers govern.’ Astronomy and cosmology were the main topics discussed during the first months of the Academy’s existence. Though interested in astronomy, Henry did not share his mother’s passion for astrology. The speeches delivered at the Academy were strongly Christian in tone, but humanism dictated the choice of topics.²⁰ Twenty-two drafts survive of texts that were read there. Each lecture lasted no more than one hour and speakers drew on their respective specialisms, such as poetry, medicine or public affairs. They tried to be lively, kept quotations to a minimum, and translated Latin terms for the king’s benefit. The ‘passions’ were a topic that assumed enormous importance. In March 1576, for example, ‘anger’, a passion with a direct impact on political behaviour, was examined. The king wanted to know ‘by what means anger could be moderated and contained’. In June it was the turn of ‘ambition’ and ‘honour’. The lecturers demonstrated overall that ‘a coherent knowledge of the passions existed and that there were common means to control them.’²¹

The Palace Academy was controversial. Not everyone believed that it was good for the monarchy. Jacopo Corbinelli, for one, disapproved of it, as did the poet, J. Passerat, who thought that chairing it was incompatible with the exercise of kingship. Some people who attended the Academy made no secret of the fact that they did so out of loyalty to the king, not because they enjoyed doing so. Ronsard’s friend, Claude Binet, admitted that he had to force himself to talk on the subjects picked by the king for discussion. Some writers did not like public speaking, while others disliked competition. Rivals at court were not necessarily keen to air their differences in public. Some may have feared the king’s judgment, for he was known to have a wicked tongue. One confessed to Henry: ‘I do not believe that there is anyone who does not feel tense when he opens his mouth before Your Majesty’. Submissiveness tended to cramp originality and argumentativeness; so the discussions from which Henry hoped to derive so much benefit tended to be artificial. The debates elicited quickness of thought rather than sincerity. Thus A. Jamyn, who spoke on the theme of joy and sadness, revealed that he had contradicted earlier speakers for no other reason. Davy du Perron, the royal lecturer in philosophy, upset the king by arguing that God did not exist after giving evidence to the contrary.

²⁰ Robert J. Sealy, *The Palace Academy of Henry III* (Geneva, 1981); Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1988), pp. 105–30.

²¹ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and reform in the French kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 44–59.

Henry was an attentive listener, but also took part in the discussions without expecting adulation. Frivolous subjects did not interest him. Only serious ones were discussed at his table or at the Academy. As R. Belleau said: 'You are the prince of this world who gets most pleasure from discovering the secrets of philosophy and of natural things'. Not all the subjects that came up for discussion are known as the Academy's papers have been lost, but some were published by their authors. Cosmography was a topic much favoured at the time. This was largely due to recently published works by Ptolemy and Copernicus. On 12 September 1577 Jacques Amyot wrote to Pontus de Tyard: 'I was delighted the other day to hear about the pleasure the king derives from hearing you talk about the constitution and movement of the sky'. De Tyard was passionate about astronomy: he had published several works on the subject which were reprinted in 1578 and 1587. In one, dedicated to the king, he wrote: 'I will not repeat here the usefulness of the science of celestial movements as your keen and well-informed mind does not need to be cajoled or persuaded...' Davy du Perron also took part in discussions, chaired by the king, on the nature of the universe. On 28 and 29 May 1586 a debate regarding Aristotle's astronomical views took place in Paris between Giordano Bruno and Jean Hennequin, on the one hand, and Raoul Callier, an erudite lawyer, and Du Perron on the other. It ended acrimoniously as Bruno failed to turn up on the second day, leaving Hennequin to argue against Aristotle as students booed him. The incident tells us about science at the court of Henry III, for Bruno rightly believed in the universe being infinite whereas Copernicus had argued in favour of its consisting of fixed spheres.

The poet, Agrippa d'Aubigné, described Henry as 'a prince of agreeable conversation with his friends'. When he was ill, he would invite them to his bedside for a chat. Brantôme much enjoyed the witty exchanges between the king and his sister, Marguerite. Henry loved raillery. He spoke of the second prince of Condé, a dull fellow, as the 'Hector of the Huguenots' and of his own failure-prone brother, Alençon, as 'my brother the Conqueror'. He even tolerated jokes at his own expense provided they were clever. He liked to exchange pleasantries in writing and chided recipients who failed to respond in kind. His love of raillery made him enemies; it could also have tragic consequences. Villequier, one of the gentlemen of his chamber, murdered his wife and one of her servants after the king had made fun of her loose morals. As Brantôme tells us, there were

many women among Henry's enemies.²² The duchess of Montpensier hated him for making fun of her limp.²³

Henry was a fine public speaker. He needed to be if he was to win public support at a time of political upheaval. His tongue could be withering as the future Marshal de Biron experienced during the siege of La Rochelle when Henry blamed him for a string of military errors.²⁴ But, not content to rely on his own natural gift, the king consulted Pibrac about public speaking. At least three treatises on the subject, including one by Jacques Amyot, were written specifically for him. Among Henry's numerous speeches, those delivered at the opening sessions of the Estates-General in 1576 and in 1588 stand out. Though drafted by others, he modified them at his pleasure. Thus, Du Perron tells us that after he had spent two nights drafting the speech for the 1588 session, the king 'extended and accommodated the main ideas according to the range and mood of his spirit while acknowledging the honour due to its author'.²⁵ On 6 December 1576 Saint-Sulpice wrote: 'The king made a speech so well expressed, so eloquent and spoken with such grace that everyone is spellbound...' ²⁶ Guillaume de Taix a deputy for the clergy, was equally impressed: 'The king,' he wrote, 'made one of the finest and most learned speeches that had ever been heard not only from a king but from one of the world's best orators. It was delivered with so much grace, assurance, gravity and sweetness that it drew tears from many listeners, not exempting myself; for my soul was so stirred by the voice of this prince that, in spite of myself, I had to shed tears'.²⁷ Twelve years later, the *avocat général* of the Parlement described the king's speech as 'very well received. It was full of eloquence, very well delivered and cast into the shade those that followed'.²⁸

A legend put out mainly in the nineteenth century, notably in the novels of Alexandre Dumas, has portrayed Henry III as a pleasure-loving monarch, keen on masked balls, small dogs and the game of cup and ball (*bilboquet*). He enjoyed these things, but also had a more serious side. Keenly aware of his political duties, he sought to learn the art of government. During the long journey from France to Poland in 1573, he invited Pibrac to share his coach and listened to him discourse on *the Politics* of Aristotle. Later, he commissioned works on political theory from Pontus de Tyard, Claude Fauchet and others.

²² Brantôme, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 9, p. 496.

²³ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 41.

²⁴ Brantôme, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 5, pp. 135–8.

²⁵ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 45.

²⁶ E. Cabié (ed.), *Guerres de religion dans le Sud-Ouest de la France* (Albi, 1906), p. 316.

²⁷ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 45–6.

²⁸ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 46.

Henry even started writing a treatise on the topic which has, alas, disappeared. He was accused in his own day of being hooked on Machiavelli. He was certainly aware of the Florentine statesman's ideas having attended Corbinelli's lectures on the *Discorsi* and the *Prince*. It does not follow, however, that he accepted them uncritically. Neither his thoughts nor his actions were exactly in line with Machiavelli's precepts. He once told an English ambassador that he aimed to be sincere in his dealings with Queen Elizabeth unlike Louis XI who had tricked the duke of Burgundy. Nor did he see any need to use force against his subjects as he firmly believed he was divinely appointed to rule. 'I am God's appointed,' he once said, 'living to command in that estate'. In his opening speech to the Estates-General of Blois in 1576, he declared: 'I know that I will have to give an account to Him of my mission and I also want to protest before Him in this assembly that I intend to rule as a good, just and legitimate king over the subjects He has entrusted to my care'.²⁹ Henry was also interested in history. His mother urged him to read the *Memoirs* of Philippe de Commynes, believing that lessons could be learnt from the War of the Public Weal against Louis XI. He also listened to readings from the *Memoirs* of Blaise de Monluc. Historians, such as Du Haillan, dedicated their works to him.³⁰

Henry loved desk-work. Even in his youth he exercised his right to sit in the king's council more often than many of its members. He attended 47 meetings out of a total of 205 between 1563 and 1567. Foreign observers were struck by the difference between him and his brother, Charles IX, who seemed mainly interested in having fun. Henry liked work and, even as king, spent much time at his desk. Although in 1584 he employed 168 secretaries, he answered personally numerous letters, petitions and dispatches. Lucinge tells us that Henry used to deal with secret business every morning without consulting anyone. During a mission to the French court, Duplessis-Mornay reported: 'To-day the king, as from 3 a.m. did nothing but write and no one entered his room'. In 1582 he asked for a window to be inserted into a wall at the Louvre dividing his room from the council chamber. This was to allow him to observe what was going on and to intervene occasionally in the council's discussions without disrupting his own work.³¹ Though authoritarian by inclination, Henry was also humane. He was affectionate towards those who served him well. When writing to his secretary, Villeroy, he even used the familiar '*tu*' or a nickname. 'I love you,' he once wrote, 'because you serve me as I wish'. He distrusted the populace while

²⁹ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 48–53.

³⁰ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 53–6.

³¹ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 56–9.

believing that he was in duty-bound to relieve poverty. He ordered collections in aid of the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris which was finding it hard to cope with huge numbers of sick people. At the end of his reign, he ordered distributions of bread and money to the poor and employed them to clean the city's moats.³²

Contemporaries often regarded Henry as effeminate, yet before his Polish adventure he was praised for his manly virtues. Physical training had loomed large in his education as was the norm for any nobleman at the time. In the third religious war he not only commanded the king's army, but displayed bravery under fire. His valour won praise from such a battle-hardened veteran as Blaise de Monluc. Following his return from Poland, however, Henry turned away from the military life. This may have been for three reasons. It was dangerous for a king, particularly one without issue, to risk death or capture. Francis I had gained nothing but humiliation by risking his life on the battlefield of Pavia. Secondly, Henry had come round to the view that religious conflict in France would only be resolved by peaceful means. He once told his secretary, Gassot, that his victories at Jarnac and Moncontour had been a waste of time. Thirdly, he was fastidious by nature. Following his accession, he liked to appear at court, wearing rich clothes and perfumed. 'This love of a soft and peaceful existence,' a Venetian diplomat noted, 'has done him much harm in the opinion of his people'.³³ Yet Henry could be strong and decisive if circumstances so required. He showed this in 1587 when he commanded the army against *reiters* who had invaded France at the invitation of the Huguenots.

French courtiers in the late sixteenth century engaged in many kinds of sport and entertainment. They loved hunting, ball games and mock tournaments. Henry would join them in such activities, but only if he happened to be in the mood and in reasonable health. He sometimes hunted, but never for more than a few days or weeks at a time. He hunted with hounds or birds and his household included a large number of huntsmen. Henry would sometimes ask members of his entourage to give him hounds or birds, a request they often conceded reluctantly. He sent a man to England to buy him hounds. Henry also had a fine collection of hunting weapons including a boar-spear, two metres long. Tennis and fencing were sports he much enjoyed. As a youth, he had been taught fencing by Italian masters. His library contained a treatise on single combat. He participated in mock battles. An English observer saw him fight with three kinds of weapon during the festivities for the wedding of the duc de Joyeuse.³⁴

³² Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 59–64.

³³ Alberi, *Relazioni*, Series I, Vol. 4, p. 305.

³⁴ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 69–73.

Henry was passionate about dancing ever since childhood when he had been taught by Italian dancing masters. He performed many kinds of dance and spent much time rehearsing new steps.³⁵ Praised for his agile footwork and high leaps, he danced at the weddings of courtiers and in their Parisian residences. During Carnival, he danced all night with Parisian ladies. Even in the privacy of his house at Ollainville, he liked to dance with local ladies regardless of their social background. He also devised ballets. In 1580 Sir Henry Cobham noted that the king gave more time to ballet than to war. He ordered ballets to be held at his court each week on Mondays and Thursdays. But we should beware of contemporary historians, hostile to Henry, who accused him of spending all of his time dancing instead of attending to more serious matters. His enormous correspondence, much of it in his own hand, tells a different story. He also enjoyed more sedentary pursuits, such as card games and dice. In 1579 he lost 30,000 *écus* to some Italian players. This may have cured him of the gambling habit, for two years later he banished the sieur d'O from court for gambling to excess. He also banned gambling in his chamber, perhaps to avoid quarrels among its members. Henry soon took up another pastime. L'Estoile writes in his *Journal*: 'At this time [August 1585] the king began to hold a cup-and-ball [*bilboquet*] in his hand, even as he walked about the streets and he played with it as do small children'.³⁶ The court followed suit. Henry also liked to make *canivets* or cut-outs. These might be illuminations taken from old manuscripts which he would mount on brightly coloured backgrounds. Following his return from Poland, he became infatuated with lapdogs. He liked to carry one even into a council meeting. Such a pet was leaping about his feet as the Venetian ambassador, Lippomano, came to take his leave. He must have admired the dog, for Henry gave it to him.³⁷ He owned about 300 such dogs. Some may have been kept in kennels, but several shared his apartment. Feeding them cost 25 1/3 *écus* per quarter. Henry also had a greyhound which was given its own servant.³⁸ Exotic animals imported from newly discovered territories outside Europe also interested him. During a visit to Dieppe in June 1576, he purchased a number. He particularly liked monkeys and parrots, often using them as gifts. He also kept larger animals. The royal accounts for 1576–77 show that 1409 *livres* 2 *sols* were spent on three lions, two tigers and a bear. But, unlike his brother Charles IX, Henry disliked animal

³⁵ Margaret M. McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 166–9; Nicolas Le Roux, *Le Roi, la Cour, l'État. De la Renaissance à l'Absolutisme* (Seyssel, 2013), pp. 26–7.

³⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 39–40.

³⁷ Tommaseo, *Relations*, Vol. 2, p. 463.

³⁸ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 76–8.

fight. Following a nightmare in which he saw himself being devoured by wild beasts, he ordered the royal menageries to be destroyed.³⁹

Henry loved the theatre. He shared his mother's dislike of tragedy and fondness for comedy, especially the *commedia dell'arte*. He was thinking about it as he travelled to Venice following his flight from Poland. He wrote to Nevers from Vienna: 'There is no better or more perfect Pantalone than yourself'.⁴⁰ Once in Venice, he asked to see a performance by *I Gelosi*, the famous company of Italian players. The authorities were told that 'the king is very keen to see them, particularly the woman who performed last winter'. She may have been the famous actress, known as Vittoria. The *Gelosi*, who were about to leave for Mantua at the time, delayed their departure and called on the king. He remembered them two years later when he wrote to his ambassador in Venice, 'now that the kingdom is a peace, I wish to invite the *Magnifique* who came to me in Venice on my return from Poland with all his troop of players, the *Gelosi*. Would you please find the said *Magnifique* and ask him to come to see me in accordance with the letter which I am writing to him and which you will give him. You will also give him the money he will need for his journey'. The king added a postscript: 'Make them come without delay and provide them with all their needs. I will reimburse you and you will please me greatly'.⁴¹ Henry got his wish: the *Gelosi* travelled to France but were kidnapped by Huguenots on their way to Blois. They were released after the king had paid a ransom and the court rejoiced when they eventually turned up and at once performed for the king. The 'Magnifico' played Pantalone and Isabella Andreini his lover. The parish register recording her death in Lyons in 1604 described her as 'one of the rarest women in the world on account of her learning and command of languages'. Once, on the eve of Shrove Tuesday, Henry and a group of courtiers rode through the streets of Paris wearing party-coloured trousers like those worn by Zanni, Harlequin and other characters in the *commedia dell'arte*.⁴²

Henry III was a fop. The Venetian ambassador, Morosini, writing around 1572, described him as follows:

His manner of dressing and his pretentious gestures make him seem delicate and effeminate, for, in addition to rich clothes which he wears with gold embroideries, precious stones and pearls of the greatest price, he gives close attention to his

³⁹ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 78–81.

⁴⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 1, p. 359, No. 969.

⁴¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, p. 433, No. 1854.

⁴² Boucher, *La cour de Henri III*, p. 108.

linen and hair-style. He usually wears around his neck a double necklace of amber mounted in gold which floats on his chest exuding a pleasant scent. But what greatly detracts from his dignity, in my opinion, is that, like women, his ears are pierced (a fairly common practice among the French); moreover, he is not content with a single ear-ring, but wears two with jewels and pearls as pendants...⁴³

Barely 20 at the time, Henry was following the current male fashion for bright, sharply contrasted, colours. An equestrian portrait shows him wearing a doublet with green and gold stripes, a maroon overgarment criss-crossed in silver, a black cape, crimson breeches with gold embroidery, green hose and white shoes. The only fashion Henry seems to have launched was wearing a bonnet within the royal apartments. This became the rule after 1579, when he was advised by his doctors always to keep his head covered.⁴⁴ His sartorial excesses, however, were intermittent. In 1576, at the Estates General of Blois, he appeared dressed entirely in black with a single small jewel as adornment. Yet, about the same time, he returned to wearing ear-rings after doing without them for several months. In January 1585 he was again covered in jewels.⁴⁵ Portraits of him in his youth show him wearing rich and brightly coloured clothes, enormous ruffs and prominent doublets, but in later portraits he is modestly dressed: his collar is turned down and his hairstyle simple. He is invariably shown wearing a black toque with a feathered aigrette.

Henry's love of rich clothes, theatre, dancing and other courtly pleasures stood in sharp contrast to his religious faith which became increasingly penitent and public in the course of his reign. Whatever doubt his sister, Marguerite, may have cast in her memoirs about his faith as a child, there is no reason to believe that, as a mature man, he was anything but a devout Catholic. He fought the Huguenots in the third religious war, was seriously implicated in the massacre of St. Bartholomew, led the Catholic party thereafter and besieged the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle. His meeting in 1574 with the future saint, Carlo Borromeo, cardinal-archbishop of Milan is said to have made a deep impression upon him which may account for his subsequent penitential exercises. Devastated by his lack of a male heir Henry began to wonder in 1582 if his childlessness was a divine punishment? This may have been suggested by the nuncio, Castelli, a disciple of Borromeo, who once declared that a wife's sterility

⁴³ Albèri, *Relazioni*, Series I, Vol. 6, p. 282.

⁴⁴ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 82.

⁴⁵ *Acta nuntiaturae gallicae 2: Girolamo Ragazzoni, évêque de Bergame, nonce en France. Correspondance de sa nonciature, 1583–86*, ed. P. Blet (Rome, 1962), pp. 349–56.

was God's punishment for her husband's sins.⁴⁶ In June 1582 Henry confided to Villeroy: 'I am aware that in the past I failed to do things that were required of me and I believe that worldly honour comes from on high...'⁴⁷ A year later he sent the duc de Joyeuse on a pilgrimage to Loretto in Italy to seek the Virgin's intercession for himself and the queen.⁴⁸ He was thinking not only of himself but also of the kingdom, for he was only too aware that if Anjou were to die, the next in line to the throne was the Protestant leader, Henry of Navarre.

The contemplative and mystical strain in Henry's character was reflected in his correspondence and reading. In 1583 Jacopo Corbinelli wrote that he was translating Fra Jacopone 'for our penitent king'. He also mentioned St. Catherine, St. Bernard and Hugh of Saint Victor. One of Henry's books was Diego de Estella's *Meditations on the love of God*. The binding is adorned with the royal arms surrounded by the insignia of the Order of the Holy Spirit. Above is a grinning skull. The cover has a medallion of the Crucifixion surrounded by a chaplet of skulls. The binding of a Psalter for use in Henry's chapel is decorated with the flames of the Holy Spirit, skeletons, coffins, torches, bells and candlesticks. Henry was uniquely able to combine profanity with mysticism. Thus, he danced at Épernon's wedding with a rosary of skulls jingling at his waist. It has been suggested that there was something medieval about his spirituality. It contained an element of chivalry and a harking back to medieval court life, yet it would be wrong to read his faith as essentially backward-looking. His mystical excesses may be said to have anticipated the 'devout humanism' of the seventeenth century as exemplified by the work of St. Francis de Sales.⁴⁹

In the 1580s Henry loved to retire from the court sometimes for weeks at a time with a handful of close friends and servants. Such breaks seem to have served a psychological need. At the end of February 1580, for example, he went to Saint-Germain with d'O, Joyeuse, Jean-Louis de La Valette's brother, Bernard, the *Premier écuyer* Liancourt, and the captain of the guard, Châteauneuf. They spent evenings attending balls in neighbouring houses. In the autumn, Henry stayed at Ollainville with Joyeuse, La Valette and d'O. On 21 January 1581 he returned to Saint-Germain with three *mignons* who served his meals and accompanied him masked to receptions in Paris given by the banker, Ludovic Adjacet. The intimate life which Henry thus shared with a few close friends seems to have suited his temperament. When he returned to Blois in September 1581

⁴⁶ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Lettres de Henry III*, Vol. 5, p. 308, No. 4576.

⁴⁸ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 93.

⁴⁹ Yates, *The French Academies*, pp. 175–6.

after several weeks spent with d'O, Joyeuse and La Valette, he seemed better prepared to face the hurly-burly of court life: he hunted, played pall-mall, and even ate in public without a barrier around his table. He even allowed nobles to approach him. Later on, pilgrimages and monastic retreats appear to have had a similarly relaxing effect.

The king's periodic withdrawals from public view caused bewilderment and resentment. The *seigneur* de Crillon complained bitterly of being kept waiting to see the king. 'The sieur de La Valette,' he wrote to the duc de Nevers on 2 November 1580, 'has gone to the queen, Arques and Do have gone to amuse themselves at one of Do's houses, so there is no one there from whom I can expect much information. Such is the state of our court!' Crillon decided to go to Ollainville although he knew that 'they do not like many people' there. He had been told by Arques and d'O that the king was there, but on arrival he found that he had left without informing anyone. Crillon's only consolation was that the duc de Guise had recently had the same experience. When he eventually traced the king to Blois, he was still unable to see him as Henry remained all day locked in his *cabinet*.

Henry did not always stay at court. He liked to visit his *mignons* in their own homes and would stay there from time to time. In May 1581, for example, d'O and La Valette accompanied him to Chenonceau from Blois before calling on Joyeuse at Montrésor. When the court returned to Paris, Henry stayed with d'O at his house in the rue de La Plâtrière. At the end of the year, after Joyeuse's marriage, the king stayed with La Valette at Fontenay-en-Brie before moving on to install Joyeuse at the château of Limours which he had bought him. By dropping in on his *mignons*, Henry hoped to prevent them becoming jealous of each other; but his behaviour displeased other courtiers, who, in 1578, formed a group that called itself '*the cabale contraire*'.⁵⁰

When separated from his *mignons*, Henry would write to them so effusively as to shock generations of historians unaccustomed to such hyperbole. As Pasquier wrote: 'He loved excessively those whom he favoured without knowing why'.⁵¹ Describing himself as their 'master', he urged his *mignons* to love him as tenderly as he loved them. He wrote to Saint-Sulpice: 'always love him [the king] well, and believe that he loves you dearly [...] and, if possible, even more'. The letter bears the sign (:S:+=) used by lovers to express the strength of their attachment. Henry also gave his *mignons* nicknames: Caylus was 'Petit Jacques', 'Petit' or 'Jacquet'. A

⁵⁰ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seyssel, 2000), pp. 254–8.

⁵¹ Estienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, ed. D. Thickett (Geneva, 1966), pp. 447–8.

letter written to Souvré in September 1577 expresses Henry's burning desire to see him soon. The *mignons*, for their part, assured Henry of their willingness to sacrifice their lives to him. They followed him in their dress and manners.⁵²

Few past rulers have been the object of such a sustained campaign of abuse as Henry III, particularly after the Blois murders of 1588. Among the numerous charges levelled at him in printed pamphlets was that he was homosexual. The evidence consists mainly of two expressions of his personality: the letters to his *mignons* expressing his love and his occasional appearances dressed as a woman. Lucinge, the Savoyard ambassador, writing in 1586, repeats the accusation that Henry had learned 'the vice that nature detests' from the godless mignon, Villequier, and that his *cabinet* 'has been a veritable seraglio of every lubricious act and lewdness, a school of sodomy, where all the filthy revels which the whole world has known about took place'.⁵³ Henry, it has to be said, played into the hands of his abusers by his fulsome epistolary style. Writing to his secretary Villeroy in 1579, he said: 'when I love, I do so without restraint ... you know how much I love you'.⁵⁴ In 1589 Pasquier wrote: 'He (Henry) loved without restraint those whom he favoured without knowing why'. A modern reader may find the king's language 'over the top', but in the sixteenth century it would have surprised no one. Phrases like 'I kiss your hands' in letters to favourites were stereotypes borrowed from Italian usage. Serious historians who have studied Henry's correspondence have found no hint of homosexuality.⁵⁵

As for Henry occasionally wearing women's clothes, this was common at the time. In 1565 during the festivities at Bayonne, Henry and his brother, Charles IX, dressed as Amazons. In February 1577 L'Estoile reported Henry 'taking part in jousts, tournaments, ballets and many masquerades in which he usually appeared dressed as a woman. Opening his doublet, he displayed his chest. He wore a necklace of pearls and three *collets* of cloth, two *à fraise* and one reversed as then worn by ladies of the court'.⁵⁶ Courtiers loved to disguise as women. In 1561 Antoine de Bourbon, a greybeard at the time, wore jewels and earrings. Under Francis II, during a tilt at the château of Amboise, the *Grand*

⁵² Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 280–88.

⁵³ René de Lucinge, sieur des Allymes, 'Miroir des princes et grands de la France et un bref discours des trois Estats du Royaume avec les conjectures de ce que doit estre de luy à l'avenir' (1586), in A. Dufour (ed.), *Annuaire-bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France* (1954–5), pp. 95–186.

⁵⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 4, p. 201.

⁵⁵ David Potter, 'Kingship in the Wars of Religion: The reputation of Henri III of France' in *European History Quarterly*, 25 (1995), 502–4.

⁵⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 2, p. 104.

Prieur appeared as an Egyptian woman carrying a monkey wrapped in swaddling clothes. The duc de Nemours fought dressed as a *bourgeoise* with a matching hair-do and a bunch of keys dangling from his belt. L'Estoile describes Henry returning to Paris in October 1577 with his troop of young *mignons* dressed in the most fanciful clothes and heavily perfumed. But, as Jacqueline Boucher has pointed out, they were far from effeminate, being 'rough swordsmen always ready to risk their lives and those of others'.⁵⁷ Amazonian disguise symbolizing chastity and courage was popular at the French court. A painting by Antoine Caron shows people dressed as amazons playing a game. This is not to say, however, that homosexuality was unknown at the court of Henry III.

So much attention has been given to Henry's *mignons* that the role played by women in his life has been underestimated. 'This prince,' wrote a Venetian, 'goes in for palace hunting: he hunts the ladies valiantly and having trapped them, does not easily let go...'⁵⁸ He had numerous affairs in the course of his life. As a bachelor, he did not mind people talking about them, but after his marriage he became more secretive out of consideration for the queen's feelings. Three of his early mistresses were Mademoiselle du Rouet, Madame d'Estrées and Mademoiselle de Châteauneuf. For a time, Henry was a frequent visitor to the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés where the nuns were noted for their worldliness. He tried unsuccessfully to seduce one of them. News of the scandal reached Rome and a papal secretary wrote that the king must be dissuaded from visiting the convent. The queen's ladies-in-waiting were fair game for Henry and his *mignons*. About 1580 he had a brief liaison with Mlle. de la Mirandole, a young Italian woman of high birth. He also hid for several days in the Hôtel de Carnavalet as he pursued Mademoiselle De Stavay, one of Catherine de' Medici's *filles d'honneur*. In 1585–86, Henry had an affair with the daughter of a Parisian *maître des comptes*.⁵⁹

Most of Henry's affairs were short-lived, but he did fall seriously in love with three women in turn: Marie de Clèves, princess of Condé; Jeanne de Laval, dame de Sennecterre; and Louise de Vaudémont. Marie de Clèves inflamed his passion by resisting his advances. It was at her family's instance that she married the second prince of Condé a few days before the massacre of St. Bartholomew. As duc d'Anjou, Henry sent her letters expressing his despair, especially as he was about to leave for Poland. Once there, he continued to write to her, sometimes dipping his pen into his own blood. He hoped that her marriage might be

⁵⁷ Boucher, *La cour de Henri III*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Tommaseo, *Relations*, Vol. 2, p. 161.

⁵⁹ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 89–93.

broken and was grief-stricken when, on his return to France, he learnt that she had recently died. He even refused to visit cardinal de Bourbon at the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Près because Marie's tomb was there. It had to be moved before he would go there. He always kept a Book of Hours that had belonged to her. Some 10 years later, Henry was again grief-stricken, though less profoundly. He had been courting a noblewoman from Auvergne, called Madame de Sennecterre. He admired her spirit and was seen at a wedding reception talking to her for three hours. In 1586, however, she died of tuberculosis. Henry called on her as she lay dying. She spoke to him. 'Without replying (for he was too sad of heart) he held out his hand and left. As he did so, tears as large as peas were seen pouring from this prince'.⁶⁰

Queen Louise was more important in Henry's life than is often assumed. He saw her first and was struck by her beauty at the court of Lorraine on the eve of his departure to Poland and he remembered her on his return after learning of the death of Marie de Clèves. He married her immediately after his coronation and seems to have loved her sincerely. She returned his feelings. A Venetian observer noted: 'she always fixes her eyes on him like person in love'.⁶¹ In 1580 Louise was briefly separated from him. She wrote of her distress at 'being parted from the presence of such a handsome, good husband, being the happiest woman in the world ... wishing to live only for him'.⁶² On 9 September 1583 Catherine de' Medici wrote: 'The king, my son, is at Bourbon-Lancy where he is taking the waters as is the queen my daughter, and I hope that God will show us his grace by giving them children. The king and queen have never been as healthy as they are now: if it pleases God to bring them back with a child in the queen's belly, it would help us overcome all our other ills...'⁶³ The sterility of the royal couple had become a matter of serious concern as the future of the dynasty was at stake. Speculation ran wild as to its cause. Louise became pregnant within months of her marriage, but her child was still-born. According to Cheverny 'an unfortunate medicine which was given to her caused her to lose the child which according to the midwives was already fully developed'. Louise never got over her loss. She felt responsible, as she indicated in a letter to a friend: 'As for the rumour that I am pregnant, I am very sad that it is untrue; it will only be so when it pleases God'. Although Henry loved his wife, he was not always faithful to her.

⁶⁰ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 245–6; Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 93–5.

⁶¹ Tommaseo, *Relations*, Vol. 2, p. 631.

⁶² Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 97.

⁶³ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1943), Vol. 8, p. 142.

He had some illegitimate children, but, unlike some of his fellow monarchs, he did not expose them to public view. When Louise discovered that he was having an affair with Mademoiselle de La Mirandole, she asked Catherine de' Medici to intervene and obtained the lady's removal from court. Catherine dismissed all talk of a possible repudiation of Louise by her son; instead she worked to reconcile them. Towards the end of his life, Henry tried to bring order to his private life: he ceased having affairs and drew closer to his wife, although he had never really abandoned her. Catherine rejoiced to see them happily together. When Louise fell ill in 1587, Henry spent part of each day at her bedside. As a widow, Louise showed much grief at her loss.⁶⁴

Apart from Louise two other women loomed large in Henry's life: his mother, Catherine and his sister, Marguerite. He was overjoyed to see his mother again on his return from Poland. 'I never saw the said king in a better mood,' Bellièvre wrote to Catherine, 'He never stops talking about your friendship for him and the obedience he wants to give you.'⁶⁵ Catherine no longer ruled France as she had done under Charles IX. She left the Louvre and took up residence in a *hôtel* close by, but continued to advise her son. Catherine sometimes chaired the Council of State but her influence declined progressively as from the spring of 1578 although her advice was upheld by her closest friends: the chancellor Birague, the duc de Nevers and marshal de Retz. Her political role changed at this time: Henry entrusted her with a number of highly delicate negotiating missions although he did not always see eye to eye with her.⁶⁶ Towards the end of his reign, she became so anxious about the royal succession that she drew closer to the Guises. Henry thought she was going too far, but such disagreements did not undermine their mutual love. 'You are my all,' Catherine wrote to Henry. She tried to see him as often as possible on his own without the presence of courtiers. He, for his part, kept a close watch on her health. In 1579 he wrote to the duchesse d'Uzès: 'My good old, old, yet beautiful, beautiful, friend. Send me news of my good mother, for I am when I know her to be in good health.'⁶⁷ In April 1584 Henry wrote to Villeroy: 'I am afraid that my mother may be unwell for a long time. If that is so, it would be better for us to be at Fontainebleau than at Monceaux. But if she has a fever, I am not sure that it would not harm her to

⁶⁴ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 96–9. Unfortunately with one exception Henry's letters to Louise have not survived. She probably destroyed them before her death (*Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, p. 580, n.1).

⁶⁵ BnF, ms.fr. 15,559 (22 June 1574).

⁶⁶ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, p. 341.

⁶⁷ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, p. 102.

move ... Having read your letter, tell her not to constrain herself for the love of God for it upsets me that she should feel obliged to go in order to please me'.⁶⁸

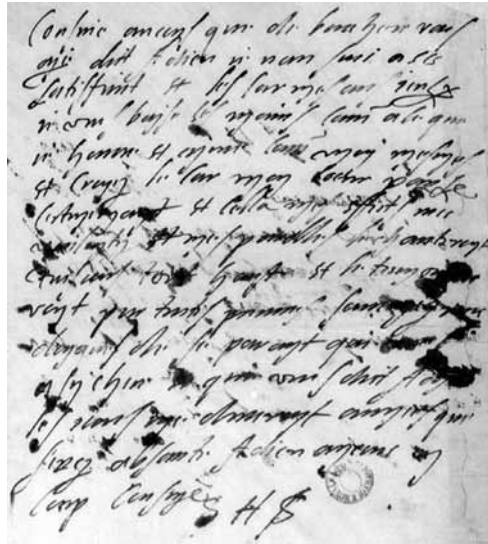


Figure 8.2 Autograph letter of Henry, duc d'Anjou, to the duchesse de Nevers (December 1572).

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Henry's relations with his sister, Marguerite, were altogether different. Her marriage with Henri of Navarre proved short-lived. He treated her with indifference and she soon considered herself free to have affairs. In 1578, however, she rejoined her husband at Nérac, but not for long. In 1580, after taking part in the so-called 'Lovers' War', Marguerite returned to the French court. Henry asked her to resume a normal married life. When she refused, he ordered her ladies and servants to be arrested and questioned. He expressed his exasperation with Marguerite in a letter to Villeroy: 'I agree with all that you have sent me for this woman as long as she goes away, for whenever I see her I wish she were dead'.⁶⁹ In August 1583 Navarre complained to Henry of Marguerite having an affair with the young Champvallon, one of Anjou's esquires. In 1584 she fled to Auvergne after trying to set up a principality around Agen, and the king ordered

⁶⁸ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 5, p. 228, No. 5291.

⁶⁹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, pp. 104–5, No. 4989.

her property to be seized in order to pay off her debts. In October 1586 he wrote to Villeroy: 'I only want her to be called "sister" in the letters patent, not "dear" or "well-beloved"'. He then added a note about her latest lover: 'The queen asks me to have Aubiac hanged and that this should be done in the presence of that miserable woman in the courtyard of the château of Usson ... See that it is done skilfully. Farewell'.⁷⁰ Jean de Galard, sieur d'Aubiac, who lived with Marguerite at Usson, was arrested and executed without a trial at Aigueperse. But with the passage of time Henry relented somewhat. He was prepared to let his sister settle at Villers-Cotterêts provided she undertook to behave properly. But the revolt of the Catholic League put paid to such an accommodation.⁷¹

Unlike his grandfather, Francis I, or his mother, Catherine de' Medici, Henry III was not a great builder. It was significantly to Catherine, not Henry, that Jacques Androuet du Cerceau dedicated the two volumes of his *Plus Excellents Bastiments de France* (1576 and 1579). But Henry did complete some building projects at the Louvre and at Saint-Germain-en-Laye started by Charles IX. He did not, however, carry on with the latter's project for a vast new château in Normandy, called Charleval. Henry, like his predecessors, wanted a rural residence where he might retire from time to time, but wanted it modest. He built it at Ollainville, not far from Paris. Surrounded by a moat, it had a central block with a round tower at each end. It no longer exists, having been pulled down in 1831.

Among public buildings commissioned by Henry, the most important was the Pont Neuf begun in 1577, linking the two banks of the Seine across the tip of the Ile-de-la-Cité. The first stone was laid on 31 May 1578 in the presence of the king, his queen and the queen-mother. If a painting, now at the Musée Carnavalet, can be trusted, the bridge, which had no houses on it, was to carry triumphal arches and pyramids, but Henry died before it could be completed. Other public buildings in Paris erected in his reign were the new Porte Saint-Antoine, the monumental gateway to the Arsenal flanked by columns shaped like gun barrels, and the large clock adorned with sculpture by Germain Pilon affixed to the square tower of the Palais de la Cité where it can still be seen to-day. But this was actually commissioned by Charles IX.

⁷⁰ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III roi shakespearien* (Paris, 1985), p. 453.

⁷¹ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, 110–11; Boucher, *La cour de Henri III*, pp. 33–4; Élianne Viennot, *Marguerite de Valois* (Paris, 1995).

A public building that Henry did commission was the lighthouse, known as the phare de Cordouan, built on an islet in the estuary of the River Gironde. A lighthouse of sorts had existed there since the Middle Ages but having fallen into disrepair, it had become a hazard to shipping. The new lighthouse, the oldest in France, was designed by Louis de Foix. It was an extraordinary structure combining palace, church and fort, but it was only completed under Henry IV.⁷²

If Henry III built little for himself, he did sponsor the building or enlargement of a large number of churches in Paris including Saint-Roch, Saint-Honoré, the nave of Saint-Nicolas des Champs, St. Eustache, the transept of Saint-Gervais, the choir of Saint-Médard, the nave and transept of St. Étienne du Mont, the first church of Saint-Jacques du Haut Pas, two porches at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois and Saint Nicolas-des-Champs. Monastic houses also mushroomed in or near Paris under Henry III. They comprised the Capuchins in the rue Saint Honoré, the Feuillants in the same street, the Cordeliers of Fontenay Saint Jacques, the Jesuits in the rue Saint-Jacques and the Minimés at Chaillot and Vincennes.

Henry's architect was Baptiste Androuet du Cerceau, the son of Jacques, author of *Les Plus Excellents Bastiments de France*. He entered the king's service aged about 30 in 1575 as a *valet de chambre* and a member of the king's bodyguard, but he was already an architect. He succeeded Pierre Lescot as architect of the Louvre in September 1578 and a month later was given responsibility for all the royal buildings in France. According to the duc de Nevers, Henry liked Baptiste on account of his willingness to do promptly and efficiently anything he wanted. He would report back to the king who would then visit a building site himself. Although Baptiste was a Huguenot, he was responsible for much of the ecclesiastical building undertaken by the king. 'I can honestly say,' wrote Nevers, 'that the said du Cerceau has done penance in plenty in his position, having designed more monasteries, churches, chapels, oratories and altars than any architect in France has done in fifty years. He has not only designed them on paper but also built them of good stone and masonry'.⁷³

⁷² Jean Guillaume, 'Le phare de Cordouan, merveille du monde et monument monarchique' in *Revue de l'art* 8 (1970), pp. 33–52.

⁷³ Martin le Roy, sieur de Gouberville, *Les Mémoires de Monsieur le duc de Nevers* (Paris, 1665), Vol. 2, pp. 28–30.



Figure 8.3 The Phare de Cordouan in the estuary of the Gironde. One of the few secular buildings commissioned by Henry III. Unfinished at his death, it was completed by his successor. Engraving after a drawing by Claude Chastillon (1559–1616).

Source: Photo RJK.

In February 1580 Baptiste signed a contract for a royal chapel to be built at the Louvre in a garden overlooking the Seine. Two years later the project was enlarged: it was now to be a monastery with a large church, but the idea was soon abandoned. In 1581 Baptiste was commissioned to build a ballroom at the Louvre but this was soon destroyed. In July 1582 a contract was signed for the south wing of the Cour Carrée to be extended, and in the same year Baptiste was commissioned to build the first storey of the chapelle des Valois at Saint-Denis.

In 1583–85 he was asked to build a Hieronymite monastery in the Bois de Boulogne and another at Vincennes; then, in 1586 another in the palace of the Tournelles. By this time, however, Baptiste was in trouble. Following the treaty of Nemours (see below p. 236), he was obliged on account of his Protestant faith to leave the court and also his house at the Pré-aux-Clercs. He continued, however, to work for Catholic nobles and also for the queen-mother. In January 1587 Henry wrote to her: 'I have even decided to get rid of du Cerceau if he refuses to attend mass in order to silence everyone and to set the example which I have to give of obeying my own commands in preference to any private consideration.'⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, p. 469.

Chapter 9

The King's Peace

Henry was ashamed of the peace of Beaulieu. He blamed his mother and allegedly avoided seeing her for two months. On 20 May 1576 he made no secret of his feelings in a letter to Pope Gregory XIII. 'It has been necessary,' he explained, 'to heal the wound with a remedy offered to us by God rather than the one we would have preferred. The knowledge that force would not do the healing caused us to cede to necessity on several points and articles which in other circumstances we would never have wished to concede'.¹ The crown's military and financial resources had only neutralized the Huguenots whose organization was far more efficient. They easily mobilized their manpower, including nobles who readily gave their services. Property sequestered from the church, wartime tax levies and the fruits of pillage sustained them financially. The crown by comparison seemed so feeble that many Catholics looked to an alternative authority for their salvation. Already under Charles IX associations and armed fraternities had been set up in a number of provinces and towns. The governor of Burgundy, Tavannes, had aimed to give the Catholics of his province an organization modelled on that of the Huguenots. In 1576 defensive associations suddenly reappeared. In Paris a perfume-maker, called La Bruyère, and his son, a councillor at the Châtelet, led resistance to the recent edict. Secret meetings were held each day and a list of supporters circulated. Outside Paris, Picardy led the opposition. On learning that Condé was to become governor of the province, Jacques d'Humières, the governor of Péronne, begged the king not to allow it to fall into Protestant hands. Led by Jacques d'Applaincourt and Michel d'Estournel, 150 noblemen rallied to his support. Secret talks led to the creation of an organization known as the League of Péronne. On 8 June Henry wrote to d'Humières deploring this development. He pointed out that Péronne was a border-town and that foreigners might take advantage of the unrest. He urged d'Humières to make the inhabitants see reason. He argued that they did not need to fear the restoration of Protestant services in their midst or the establishment of a garrison. He had been forced to make concessions for the sake of peace and Péronne could not be an exception. Condé's troops would

¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, No. 1843, pp. 426–7.

be well paid and he had appointed a Catholic as town governor. The king asked the governor to require d'Applaincourt and Estourmel to leave the town, and other nobles to desist from opposing the edict, but his appeal fell on deaf ears.² D'Humières was soon joined by the governors of Ham and Doullens.

The League of 1576 was not restricted to Péronne. Apart from Paris, Angoulême and Bourges, it reached Brittany, Normandy and Poitou. In June, Huguenots were warned that Amiens, Abbeville, Saint-Quentin, Beauvais, Corbie and other towns in Picardy had joined Péronne in opposing the peace. In July, Henry asked the authorities in Amiens to urge the people to abide by the settlement, and in August he urged the *échevins* of Montdidier not to join the Picard 'league and associations'. The duc de Montpensier, governor of Brittany, was instructed to suppress 'secret moves and practices' involving 'arms and horses' in his *gouvernement*. In mid-September, Louis de La Trémoille, duc de Thouars and 60 nobles formed a league for the defence of Catholicism in Poitou. Within a short time the League of Péronne had become an almost nationwide movement. How far Henri duc de Guise was involved in setting it up is debatable. According to Dale, the English ambassador, the duke was often to be seen in Paris where he had become a popular hero following his victory at Dormans. Whatever may have been his role in Picardy, he does seem to have been instrumental in spreading the movement to other parts of France. In June 1576 the king was warned of a secret association of noblemen and towns dedicated to resisting the edict of pacification by armed force if necessary. The dukes of Guise, Mayenne and Nemours, who were suspected of leading it, were required by Henry to swear on oath to respect the edict.

The king and his mother now set about winning over leading members of the opposition. On 20 July Catherine informed Condé that she was sending Paul de Foix to assure him of the king's good intentions. In August, Henry sought to defuse the crisis in Picardy by offering Condé the town of Saint-Jean d'Angély instead of Péronne. At the same time, Catherine sought to win over Damville. She lavished favours on his wife when she visited Paris. On 13 October Catherine invited the marshal to meet her in Cognac where she planned to meet Henri de Navarre, but the meeting never took place as Navarre raised difficulties and Henry wanted his mother to join him in Blois where the Estates-General were due to meet. The duc d'Anjou proved more pliable. Having been invited by the Dutch Catholics to become their king, he needed to break with the Huguenots. Catherine met him at Saumur and warned him of the threat to the dynasty posed by the Guises. In mid-November, Anjou was honourably received by Henry at

² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 2, No. 1879, pp. 443–4.

Ollainville. Catherine was delighted. On 23 November she wrote to the abbé de l'Isle from Blois telling him of her satisfaction at seeing the brothers reconciled.



Figure 9.1 Portrait of Catherine de' Medici (pierre noire and red chalk on paper) by François Clouet (c.1510–72). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

Henry III was in a difficult position. He had been a die-hard Catholic for a long time. He had defeated the Huguenots at Jarnac and Moncontour, participated in the massacre of St. Bartholomew and besieged La Rochelle. Only with reluctance and as the price of being elected king of Poland had he accepted religious toleration in that country. On returning to France, he remained committed to restoring religious unity among his subjects and viewed the concessions made to the Huguenots in the Edict of Beaulieu as a personal humiliation. He longed to expunge it but needed money and troops. He looked to the Estates-General to help him. While Henry was becoming reconciled to his brother, the election of deputies got underway, but only a handful of Huguenots were elected and one opted not to serve. The deputies began to arrive in Blois in

mid-November and soon got down to business.³ The three estates met separately to draw up their *cabiers de doléances* based on local petitions brought by the deputies. They had to decide how to restore religious peace to the kingdom, bring order to the king's finances and ensure the effective participation of the estates in government. A majority opposed the recent edict of pacification, believing that the best way to restore religious peace was to eradicate heresy. The clergy called for religion in France to be restricted to the Catholic faith. Most nobles shared this view but a significant minority favoured a more tolerant approach.⁴

The move by prelates and nobles to form associations aimed at overturning the Peace of Monsieur constituted a serious threat to Henry III's authority. Unpalatable as it was to him, the Edict of Beaulieu was royal legislation that needed enforcement unless he decided otherwise. He could not allow his subjects to take the law into their own hands by forming armed leagues. If, on the other hand, he could lead the opposition, he might at least safeguard his authority until the estates gave him the means to enforce it. On 2 December, he sent to all provincial governors a deed of association which he wanted everyone to sign.⁵ In each province a force of armed cavalry was to be set up and a fund raised for its upkeep. Catholics who refused to join an association were to be regarded as enemies of God, king and country. Finally, peaceful Protestants were to be assured that their freedom of conscience (but not, by implication, of worship) would be respected as well as their lives and property. By making himself head of the Catholic League, Henry hoped to reaffirm his authority and to dissuade others from acting independently. Historians generally have interpreted his action as a ploy to circumvent Guise ambitions.

The Estates-General of Blois (1576)

The opening of the Estates-General was preceded by a religious ceremony. The deputies processed from the church of Saint-Sauveur in Blois to the royal château where a group of senior churchmen escorted the king to the chapel to hear mass and watch him receive communion. Guillaume Ruzé, bishop of Angers, preached a sermon on the text: 'Fear God. Honour the king. Seek Fraternity'.

³ J. Russell Major, *The Deputies to the Estates-General in Renaissance France* (Madison, 1960), pp. 163–5.

⁴ Mack P. Holt, 'Attitudes of the French nobility at the Estates-General of 1576' in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18 (1987), p. 494.

⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, pp. 85–8.

He reminded the deputies that all reformation of life began with penitence. God would answer their prayers if they were truly penitent. Corruption from within was more dangerous than threats from without. On 6 December, the Estates were opened in the great hall of the château. Henry had worked closely with Artus de La Fontaine-Soliers in planning the event. 'It was perhaps the nearest he would ever come to realizing his ideal of a well-ordered royal commonwealth.'⁶ He made a long speech which was acclaimed as a triumph by all who heard it. Bodin praised its graceful delivery, and Guillaume de Taix, dean of Troyes, was moved to tears by it.⁷ While urging the deputies to prove 'the zeal and affection which a good and faithful subject owes to his king', Henry announced that he had brought them together to find the means of bringing peace to the kingdom. He was aware, he said, that the people naturally tended to blame monarchs for the calamities that hit them. After reminding his audience that the kingdom's troubles had resulted from Charles IX's minority, he defended Catherine de' Medici's actions. He urged everyone to recognize the 'singular affection' she felt for the kingdom as well as her 'love and maternal affection' for its subjects. He then recalled that in his youth he had exposed his own life to the hazards of war and had found his kingdom at his accession in a state of confusion. This was why he had set out to persuade the belligerents to lay down their arms. He wished to bring about a general reconciliation of all his subjects and prayed God to end his rule if he failed to relieve his subjects of their present miseries. He saw himself as God's instrument and knew that he would be answerable to Him for the manner in which he would discharge his mission. God had not placed a crown on his head and a sceptre in his hand to manifest His wrath, but so that he, Henry, might be 'the instrument of His glory, the dispenser of His grace and blessing on the infinite number of creatures he had entrusted to his care and protection'. His first duty was to consolidate the peace.⁸

The third estate was more divided than the clergy and nobility on the question of religious unity. Six *gouvernements* supported a motion put forward by a Parisian lawyer calling on the king to restore religious unity 'by the most gentle and holy ways that His Majesty shall devise', while five specified that religious union should be secured 'without war'. But the majority insisted on the complete suppression of Protestantism and the banishment of all Huguenot ministers, deacons, elders and schoolmasters. On 19 December a majority

⁶ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), p. 82.

⁷ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 82.

⁸ *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, ed. Laurent Bourquin (Paris, 2001–7), Vol. 3, pp. 345–8.

of the second estate backed a single religion. Henry hoped that the Estates-General would enable him to overturn the Edict of Beaulieu. Publicly he had undertaken to uphold it, but secretly he wanted an excuse to abrogate it and, if possible, blame his subjects for so doing. He, therefore, welcomed their demand that only the Catholic faith should be recognized in his kingdom. Henry had, in fact, engineered that decision by ensuring that mainly Catholics had been elected to the estates; but his policy carried grave risks. It had to be kept secret for fear of unleashing a new massacre of Huguenots. When it was rumoured that such an event was planned for 15 December, Henry issued a formal denial: 'I have no greater wish or desire,' he wrote, 'than to ensure that my subjects live in mutual friendship, unity and concord.'⁹ By 22 December he seemed confident of success. He informed his mother's council that he could no longer accept two religions in his kingdom. On 3 January 1577 he made his decision public. In the meantime, his privy councillors urged him to join the Estates-General in showing to the Protestants that the kingdom wanted Catholicism to be its only religion. Henry was also urged to guarantee the safety of loyal Huguenots while preparing to fight the rest. Before coming to blows, he and the Estates invited Condé, Navarre and Damville to come to Blois for talks. While Condé refused to receive the delegation and denounced the Estates-General as a puppet body set up and corrupted by royal agents, Navarre asked them to reconsider their demand for religious unity.¹⁰

Henry III hoped that the estates, after voting for religious unity, would give him the means to bring it about, but he was to be disappointed: they were willing enough to go along with him as long as this cost them nothing. As soon as he asked for money, they recoiled. Failing a subsidy, he asked to be allowed to alienate parts of his domain, but got neither. On 31 December de Nicolai, first president of the *Chambre des comptes* reported to the estates. He attributed the deplorable state of the king's finances to debts Henry had inherited. He urged the deputies to find a remedy and, at his request, an audit commission was set up. Hoping to ward off new demands, the second estate decided on 7 January that the king could form an adequate army for three months by raising the *tailion*, but the other estates thought otherwise. The third estate demanded a reduction of the *taille* and abolition of the *tailion*. They also wanted the nobles to share the costs of war and to supply the *arrière-ban* at their own expense. On 9 January

⁹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2165, pp. 98–9.

¹⁰ Mark Greengrass, 'A day in the life of the third estate: Blois, 26th December 1576' in A.E. Bakos (ed.), *Politics, Ideology and the Law in Early Modern Europe* (University of Rochester Press), pp. 73–90.

the audit commissioners produced their report. Instead of suggesting new ways of raising funds, they blamed the current fiscal crisis on royal extravagance and the alienation of crown lands.¹¹ On 30 January Henry III sent Anjou and Guise to beg the nobles to provide him with six months' military service at their own expense. As time elapsed, more noble deputies began to question the decision to renew the war. The deputy for Brittany warned of the danger which the king's demand presented to his people, while the deputy for Chartres argued that it was more important to establish a firm peace than to replenish the king's coffers.

The Estates submitted their final *cabiers* to the king on 9 February. He asked them to remain in Blois while he prepared his replies, but many preferred to go home. The nobility's *cabier* did not call for a resumption of war against the Huguenots: it focused mainly on noble privileges and the administration of justice. False and foreign nobles were accused of undermining the traditional role of the *noblesse de race* in government and society. The *cabier* also complained that the nobility's traditional exemption from taxation was being eroded. It called for a ban on anyone taking up arms without the king's permission. The *cabier* also complained of venality of office, of fiscal abuses and of new and excessive subsidies and taxes. It called for a reduction in the number of offices and sovereign courts, for a ban on the traffic and sale of judicial offices, for the chancellor to be 'a true and native Frenchman' and the abolition of *élections*. The *cabiers* of the other estates were equally disgruntled. The third estate called for lower taxes and a reduction of the *taille*. Only the clergy offered the king financial assistance. Pressed by the cardinals of Bourbon and Guise, they granted him the paltry sum of 450,000 *livres*. When Henry tried to raise an additional 300,000 *livres* by alienating crown lands, he was foiled by the third estate. 'They won't help me with their money,' he complained, 'and they won't let me help myself with mine: it's too cruel'.

In Paris a number of pamphlets circulated denouncing the Estates' decision to resume the war against the Huguenots. L'Estoile cites 18 of them in his *Journal*. Doubtless written by Huguenots, they attacked the representatives of the three orders and to a lesser extent the king's entourage. Six sonnets, which may have been composed by the same person, attacked the vices of the courtiers. Flattery, telling lies, blaspheming, mockery, dissimulation and cowardice were described as the daily habits of 'the king's slaves'. Their sexuality also came in for abuse. The *mignons* were accused of ignoring Venus, imitating Ganymede, turning nature

¹¹ O. Ulph, 'Jean Bodin and the Estates-General of 1576', *Journal of Modern History*, 29 (1947), p. 291.

on its head and setting up a public brothel. Breach of faith as exemplified by the Estates' decision was identified with sexual deviance.¹²

On 28 February the duc de Montpensier spoke movingly of the distress he had seen as he returned from a mission to the king of Navarre. 'When I consider the evils which the recent wars have brought us,' he said, 'and how much this division is leading to the ruin and desolation of this poor kingdom and the calamities such as those which I saw on my journey here, of poor people immersed in poverty without hope of ever being able to raise themselves from that state except by means of peace ... I am constrained to advise their Majesties to make peace ... being the only remedy and best cure that I know of for the evil that has spread all over France.'¹³ The duke indicated that he still believed that France should have only one religion – Catholicism – but thought the Huguenots should be tolerated until they could be reconciled by some peaceful means. Soon afterwards, he presented to Henry a remonstrance signed by 24 nobles objecting to their estate's decision to renew the war. The king received it graciously but indicated that he had to follow the advice of the majority of the second estate and of his council.¹⁴

Henry's predicament was compounded by the League's distrust. The Picard nobles would only swear his oath of association if their franchises and privileges were respected. When d'Humières tried to gain control of Amiens, he was refused entry and the king had to exempt the inhabitants from the League by paying them 8,000 *livres*. He had every reason to feel discouraged. Having opted for war, not out of religious fanaticism, but in order to efface the humiliation of the Edict of Beaulieu, he could not count on the League's support and was virtually penniless. On 1 March Henry had to revise his policy. 'Gentlemen,' he told his council, 'each of you has seen how hard I have tried to honour God and how much I have wanted only one religion in my kingdom. Needless to say, I have even solicited the deputies of the three estates and asked them to vote for religious uniformity in the belief that they would help me carry out this holy resolution. But seeing what little money they have given me, I have little hope of executing my intentions ... and do not consider myself a failure if, for the present, I do not speak out in favour of permitting just one religion in my kingdom,

¹² *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 2, pp. 42–9.

¹³ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion 1562–1629* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 108.

¹⁴ Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 85–6.

because I simply do not have the means to do it'.¹⁵ The king was supported in the council by his mother, who argued that religious unity would only be achieved if the kingdom were preserved, not destroyed, by civil war. According to Bodin, the peace party in the council included Biron, Cossé, Montpensier, Jean de Morvillier and Pomponne de Bellièvre. They were opposed by Guise, Mayenne, Nevers and the cardinal of Guise.¹⁶ Henry now hoped that if there was to be a war, it would be short. The only bright spot for him was his reconciliation with Damville. The king offered him the marquisate of Saluzzo if he would hand over the towns he was holding without prejudice to his governorship of Languedoc.¹⁷ After accepting the deal, Damville deserted his Huguenot allies and renewed his allegiance to the king.

Having failed to obtain from the Estates-General the subsidies he had expected, Henry soon gave up the idea of forcing the Huguenots to become Catholics. All he wanted now was a peace settlement less humiliating than the last. Even this more limited objective, however, required a show of force and funding. Henry reckoned that he needed at least two million *livres*. He hoped to get 1.2 million by raising forced loans on the walled towns and the rest from the *taille*. He also hoped for another million from a clerical tenth.¹⁸ But the towns let him down: while some begged to be exempt, others flatly refused to pay or dragged their feet. Yet the king did manage to raise 20 companies of *gendarmerie*, 60 of infantry, 18 cannon and six smaller guns as well as enough powder and shot for 10,000 shots.¹⁹ But he could only afford to keep them in the field for a month. Writing to Nevers from Blois on 13 April, he said: 'Please do the best you can to ensure that our *deniers* are used sparingly for, as you know, they are hard to come by, especially as the infantry must be paid in cash'.²⁰

At this juncture, the duc d'Anjou abandoned his alliance with the Huguenots, not for religious reasons, but to advance his own career.²¹ Henry gave him nominal command of the royal army as it was about to engage the rebels, but the effective commander was the duc de Nevers seconded by the dukes of Guise and Mayenne. As the court moved from Blois to Chenonceau, the army

¹⁵ *Mémoires de Nevers*, Vol. 1, pp. 176–7. Cited by Holt in 'Attitudes of the French nobility at the Estates-General of 1576', p. 503.

¹⁶ *Mémoires de Nevers*, Vol. 1, pp. 176–7. Cited by Holt in 'Attitudes of the French nobility at the Estates-General of 1576', p. 503, n. 48.

¹⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2323, pp. 177–8.

¹⁸ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2391, pp. 215–6; Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 88.

¹⁹ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 88, n. 76.

²⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2390, pp. 214–15.

²¹ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 92.

gathered at La Chapelle-d'Anguillon, north of Bourges, with a view to besieging La Charité-sur-Loire which had recently fallen to the Huguenots. As it waited for Guise and other noblemen to arrive, it began to run short of food and provisions. On 21 April Anjou informed the king that neither the money needed to pay the infantry nor the food and wine promised by the town of Orléans had arrived. He pleaded for an urgent delivery of wheat. Henry replied that the local inhabitants would have to meet the army's need. 'I am very distressed,' he wrote to Nevers on 26 April, 'to hear that my brother and some of the princes and chief noblemen who are with him are, like common soldiers, regularly exposing themselves to every sort of danger. I fear some sinister or irreparable accident, so please tell my brother from now on to be more careful ... It is not proper for the head of the army, especially a person of such quality and respect, to expose himself to such hazards'. The king urged Anjou to 'take care of himself and to execute his enterprise and see it through with few losses to his men'.²²

The siege of La Charité, which began on 25 April 1577, lasted only seven days. The royal army suffered few casualties, but Anjou and Nevers failed to prevent their troops from sacking the town. Henry seemed unaware of this on 3 May when he congratulated his brother on his victory for he praised his merciful treatment of the inhabitants whose disloyalty deserved to be severely punished. Writing to the *sieur* de Matignon, he praised the mercy shown to them as evidence 'that ... my arms are always raised to receive mercifully those wise enough to obey me'. Yet, in the same letter, he reported that the duc de Maine had just captured Tonnay-Charente and that several hundred defenders had been 'cut to pieces' for refusing to parley.²³ Henry was delighted by the capture of La Charité. He thanked his brother on 3 May for serving him with so much care and effort and asked him to convey his gratitude to Guise and Nevers and all the other princes, lords and captains who had taken part in the siege whom he intended to reward in due course. He also promised Anjou a 'more than fraternal' reward, but Henry remained mindful of the divided state of the kingdom. The situation in Languedoc required urgent attention before the rebellious towns could take advantage of the harvest due to begin in June. He now instructed Anjou on how to dispose his troops. Some were to be sent to Languedoc urgently. Passing through Auvergne, they were to help capture the towns of Embert and Issoire but not to linger there. Henry also announced that he was providing an army under the duc de Guise to guard France's eastern border. He wanted Anjou's landsknechts to join his own army in Poitou along

²² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2408, pp. 226–7.

²³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2422, pp. 237–8.

with artillery and gunpowder. The rest of the artillery was to be sent by river to Orléans. As for the *gendarmérie*, Henry wanted Anjou's companies to be paid off and the rest disbanded without pay, for 'it is not reasonable for companies that have lived off the poor people without giving service to be paid like the rest who have served'. Finally, he asked his brother to appoint a 'loyal and Catholic' nobleman to administer La Charité and a garrison as numerous as he would judge necessary. Breaches in the town wall were to be promptly repaired at the cost of the inhabitants. Henry wanted the bridge demolished, but when told that this would stop traffic along the river, he let Anjou decide.²⁴ Three days later he wrote to Damville urging him to do everything possible to win over the Huguenots. They could rest assured that their homes and consciences would be respected. 'They will find in me,' Henry added, 'all the clemency and kindness that good subjects should expect from their king in addition to the good they will do to themselves and to their fatherland by ending so many murders, acts of pillage and countless other evils suffered by the poor people on account of the civil wars that are due to their stubbornness ... For my part I have no greater wish than to reunite all my subjects and establish a good and lasting peace in my kingdom'.²⁵ On 15 May, following Anjou's return to court, Henry laid on a banquet for him and the other victors at Pléssis-les-Tours 'at which', according to L'Estoile, 'ladies dressed in green and in men's clothes served and all the attendants wore green'. The green silk allegedly cost 60,000 francs. On 9 June Catherine de' Medici also gave a banquet, this time at Chenonceau, costing almost twice as much. 'At this fine banquet,' writes L'Estoile, perhaps mischievously, 'the most beautiful and honest ladies of the court, who were topless and had their hair down like brides, were employed to serve'.²⁶

On 28 May Anjou rejoined the army outside Issoire in Auvergne. By now, it numbered only about 5,000 men. After the town's governor had been called upon four times to surrender, he was warned: 'If you do not recognize the king as your sovereign, you will be battered by thirty pieces of artillery and put to the sword without mercy'. The governor's objection that surrender would contravene the edict of Beaulieu was disregarded. On 4 June Henry instructed his brother to act. 'I hope that God will soon bless you with the same success as at La Charité', he wrote, 'and that those [in Issoire] will be punished for their rebellion as they deserve'.²⁷ On 12 June the town surrendered and the defenders

²⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2419, pp. 232–6.

²⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2430, p. 243.

²⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 2, p. 112–13.

²⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2481, pp. 276–8.

were slaughtered by Anjou's troops. As De Thou noted, 'most of the town and all its riches were reduced to ashes'.²⁸ An official pamphlet, published soon after the event, blamed the inhabitants' rebellion and stubbornness for their cruel fate, which, it claimed, demonstrated the uselessness of resisting 'the invincible force and the king's army upheld by the hand of God'. A strong wind on 3 June and a bolt of lightning that had struck the steeple of the main church in the town were taken as proof of divine wrath.²⁹ Anjou, who had not been implicated in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, now joined his mother and brother in having bloodstained hands. The Huguenots were never to trust him again.

On 19 July Anjou was once more fêted at court. On the Atlantic coast the duc de Mayenne laid siege to Brouage, an important Huguenot stronghold at the heart of salt production. The garrison surrendered on 18 August and the victors seized a highly profitable quantity of salt. At the same time, the Huguenots of the Midi faced a new enemy in the person of Henri de Montmorency-Damville who had come over to the king's side. These developments cleared the way for a new peace treaty, signed at Bergerac on 14 September 1577 and published three days later at Poitiers. The main difference with the Peace of Monsieur was that Protestant worship outside Paris was allowed in only one town per *bailliage* instead of two and in towns held by the Huguenots on 17 September. The exclusion zone around Paris was enlarged. Half the bi-partisan courts were abolished and the proportion of Huguenot judges in the rest was reduced to a third. The Huguenots were allowed to keep eight surety towns, but only for six years. Catholic worship was to be reinstated throughout the kingdom and all leagues and associations were banned.³⁰ Although not yet fully acquainted with the treaty's terms, Henry felt confident enough to call it 'my peace'. On 16 September, he wrote to Mandelot, governor of Lyons, that it would be found to be 'far more honourable and advantageous to Catholics than had been the last edict'.³¹ A few days later, he wrote to Saint-Sulpice that 'the signing of the peace was the thing I most wanted in this world so as to remedy the great ills that afflict my kingdom'. Henry had buried the humiliation of the peace of Monsieur.³²

²⁸ Jacques-Auguste De Thou, *Histoire universelle depuis 1543 jusqu'en 1607* (London, 1734), Vol. V, p. 373.

²⁹ Nicolas Le Roux, *Les guerres de religion* (Paris, 2009), p. 218.

³⁰ N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 270–73, 362–3; Penny Roberts, *Peace and Authority during the French Religious Wars* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 40–41.

³¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2689, p. 383.

³² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 3, No. 2697, pp. 385–6.

The king now seemed convinced that violence was not the way to achieve the concord he so much desired. Henceforth, he seemed more concerned to reform the Catholic community than to extirpate heresy. Yet once again applying the edict ran into difficulties. Condé and Navarre failed to impose their authority in their respective *gouvernements* of Picardy and Guyenne. In many provinces places of worship promised in the edict were refused. Not all the bi-partisan courts were set up and numerous Catholic associations survived their ban. Although France was now officially at peace, anarchy persisted, especially in the south. 'The peace of Bergerac was a messy affair in which even the most basic elements of its implementation, the suspension of hostilities, remained in doubt in many places, giving the lie to the attempts at reform that would follow in its wake.'³³ A nobleman waging war on his own account with an armed gang of his own recruitment became commonplace under Henry III. Captain Merle, for example, terrorized the hill towns in Gévaudan and Auvergne over a decade and would only give up his conquests in return for a ransom. Such conduct was ever likely to provoke unrest among the peasantry. Thus, in 1578 peasants in Provence, called *Razats*, took up arms. Comprising both Catholics and Protestants, their main concern was self-defence; but their movement often seemed aimed at the nobility. In 1579 they massacred a group of nobles at Cuers and, about the same time, the peasants of Callas sacked the château of the local seigneur. Large-scale peasant revolts also broke out in Vivarais and Dauphiné. In 1579 Marshal Bellegarde warned Lesdiguières, the Huguenot commander in Dauphiné, that arming peasants threatened seigneurial authority.³⁴

Catherine de' Medici's Peace Mission

For some reason – possibly pressure of business elsewhere – Henry left the task of pacifying the south to his mother. An accomplished negotiator, Catherine 'knew how to keep her eye on the longer-term strategy'.³⁵ After taking leave of Henry at Ollainville on 2 August, she set off, accompanied by her daughter, Marguerite, who wished to be reunited to her husband, Henri of Navarre. With them were the cardinal de Bourbon, the duc de Montpensier, the secretary of state, Pinart, and some of the king's ablest councillors: Saint Sulpice, Paul de Foix

³³ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 138.

³⁴ J.H.M. Salmon, 'Peasant Revolt in Vivarais, 1575–80', in *French Historical Studies*, 11 (1979), pp. 1–28.

³⁵ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 193.

and Jean de Monluc. For a time, Catherine enjoyed the company of her close friend, the duchesse d'Uzès, the duchesse *douairière* de Condé and the duchesse de Montpensier. The queen-mother expected her mission to last two months. In fact, eight months were to elapse before she left Guyenne in April 1579 on another mission, this time to Languedoc, Provence and Dauphiné. She did not see Henry again till 30 October 1579 in Orléans. Catherine's overriding motive was 'the maternal love which I bear to the said king and queen, my children, along with the great affection which I feel for the welfare and grandeur of this kingdom'. She felt sure that the king's subjects, on learning of his genuine commitment to the peace, would rally to make it effective. Wherever she went, Catherine called on local notables to embrace the peace and live in friendship as they had done when her children were young. Her energy impressed everyone. Awake before 6 a.m., she would work till 5 p.m. She provided occasions for speech-making and displays of royal majesty and generosity, including the release of prisoners. On reaching Bordeaux, she wrote to Bellièvre urging him to stop at all cost an invasion of France by John Casimir. Catherine, for her part, would try to avert a storm by convincing Navarre and the Huguenots that the king was not planning their ruin. 'I hope', she explained, 'to do far more for the service of the king and the kingdom here than I would do by staying with him and giving...bad (i.e. unpalatable) advice'.³⁶ Catherine vowed not to leave the Midi until she had restored peace to the region. One of her first acts was to dissolve a Catholic confraternity in Bordeaux believed to be behind the Parlement's opposition to the recent peace. On 29 September she delivered a withering critique of the magistrates' conduct, and Paul de Foix warned them of the king's displeasure unless they published the edict of pacification in full. The confraternity was wound up and the city's security reformed. On 2 October Catherine and Marguerite met Henri of Navarre at La Réole. Lengthy negotiations led to an accord at Nérac on 28 February 1579. This allowed Huguenots to set up churches (called *temples*) wherever their services were authorized. They obtained about 15 surety towns in the Midi for six months and a bi-partisan court in Agen.³⁷ Catherine would have liked now to return to Paris, but she still had work to do in the south. Leaving Marguerite and her husband in Gascony, she continued to travel through the harsh winter months. In spite of frequent bouts of 'colic', catarrh and rheumatism, she could still enjoy her surroundings. As spring returned, she enthused over 'the flowering beans,

³⁶ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1943), Vol. 6, pp. 38–9.

³⁷ Le Roux, *Guerres de religion*, pp. 220–21.

the hard almonds, the fat cherries'.³⁸ On 18 May 1579 she wrote to the duchesse d'Uzès of the hazards that lay ahead: above all in the Cévennes where 'there are birds of prey, like those who stole your horses. But I put my trust in God, who will always, it seems, protect me from danger. I trust Him completely'. Catherine thanked her friend for telling her of the good understanding that now existed between the king and Anjou. Her children seemed at last willing to give her satisfaction. 'My daughter is with her husband. I had news from them yesterday: they are the best couple anyone could wish for. I pray God to maintain it in this happy state, and to keep you until the age of 147 so that we may dine together at the Tuileries without hats or bonnets'.³⁹ On 29 May the queen-mother entered Montpellier, a Huguenot stronghold that had recently risen against the king. She described the citizens as 'the most cantankerous and the worst that I have ever seen and so many birds of prey: they want neither peace nor anything good'.⁴⁰ Yet Catherine managed to settle a dispute over the church of Notre-Dame des Tables which was still being used by Protestants although, under the edict of pacification, it should have reverted to Catholic use. A compromise was reached: the Protestants gave up the nave while keeping the tower.⁴¹ Catherine rejoiced over her success. 'I have seen all the Huguenots of Languedoc,' she wrote to the duchesse d'Uzès. 'God, who always backs me, has given me so much favour that I have got the better of them [here] as well as in Guyenne'. Yet she remained apprehensive. 'I am so worried about the quarrels in Provence that my mind can only conjure up anger ... I do not know that the people of Dauphiné will be any better. If the proverb that the sting is in the tail is true, I much fear that I may find it so, but my hope is always in God'.⁴² Unrest in Provence was as much social as religious. The nobles were divided into two factions: the *Razats* and the *Carcistes*.⁴³ In May the *Razats* had captured the chateau of Trans, slaughtering the garrison, whereupon the *Carcistes* had retaliated by killing 400 people. Ordering both sides to lay down their arms, Catherine summoned their representatives to Marseilles and offered them a partial amnesty. 'After playing my part and allowing them to play theirs,' she wrote, 'I made them all kiss each other'. During the next week, she chose councillors from the Parlement of Aix and a president to judge crimes committed during the recent troubles and asked

³⁸ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 6, p. 325.

³⁹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 6, p. 367.

⁴⁰ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 6, p. 339.

⁴¹ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 210.

⁴² *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 6, p. 381.

⁴³ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, pp. 215–17.

the king to add eight or nine councillors from the Parlement of Paris as well as the president, Bernard Prévost, a man noted for his severity.⁴⁴

Although Catherine often acted on her own, she always kept Henry informed of her actions and consulted him whenever possible. He was duly grateful. Writing to his ambassador in Venice, he said: 'The queen, my lady and mother, is at present in Provence, where I hope that she will restore peace and unity among my subjects as she has done in Guyenne and Languedoc, and that, as she passes through Dauphiné, she will be able to do likewise. By this means will she implant in the hearts of all my subjects a memory and eternal recognition of her benefactions which will oblige them for ever to join me in praying God for her prosperity and health.'⁴⁵ This was only one of many letters in which the king expressed his filial gratitude.⁴⁶ On 3 September 1578 he wrote to the duchesse d'Uzès: 'Above all bring back our good mother in good health for our happiness depends upon this.'⁴⁷

Among towns visited by Catherine in 1579 was Romans, a textile centre in Dauphiné, where she was greeted by a large crowd of craftsmen led by a draper, called Jean Serve, alias Paumier, who had seized control of the town's gates and walls from the local patricians. In 1580 they retaliated during the carnival celebrations: Paumier was murdered and several of his followers executed.⁴⁸ This event underscores the difficulty of generalizing about the motives behind the Wars of Religion: each town or village had its own reasons for resorting to arms. Religion was not always at stake. Taxation was a major issue in Dauphiné. The third estate wanted the *taille personnelle* – a direct tax assessed on a person's social status – to be replaced by a land tax – the *taille réelle* – thereby effectively suppressing the tax exemption traditionally claimed by the nobility. On reaching Montélimar, Catherine revealed where her sympathies lay: she praised the nobility in a speech to a distinguished assembly. This did not go down well with commoners in Valence and Romans, yet they agreed to abandon all 'leagues and associations'. Moving on to Grenoble, the queen-mother heard the grievances of all the estates. She roundly castigated Jean de Bourg, the spokesman of the third estate, who had asked that differences between the estates should be judged by the king, not by the councillors who were accompanying her. Peace in Dauphiné was precarious. In March 1579 Bellegarde had occupied Saluzzo after

⁴⁴ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), p. 426.

⁴⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 4, No. 3377, p. 197.

⁴⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3224, 3370, 3401, 3450, 3486, 3569.

⁴⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 4, No. 3083, p. 70.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival: A People's Uprising at Romans, 1579–80* (London, 1980).

quarrelling with the governor, Charles de Birague. Henry III thought of sending an army against him, but this would have ignited civil war. Catherine preferred to seek the duke of Savoy's mediation. On 17 October an agreement, wholly favourable to Bellegarde, was reached. After begging the king's pardon, he was given the marquisate, but died two months later. On 20 October Catherine made peace with several Huguenot communities in Dauphiné. In return for a promise to lay down their arms, she assured them that the king would attend to their grievances. She also allowed them to occupy nine surety towns for six months. In November a truce effectively brought hostilities to an end.

Henry III, meanwhile, had fallen seriously ill. He developed an ear abscess similar to that which had killed his elder brother, Francis II. Catherine nearly went out of her mind. ⁴⁹ *'Ma commère'*, she wrote to the duchesse d'Uzès, 'I have been deeply affected and not without cause, for he [Henry] is my life, and without him I wish neither to live nor exist. I believe that God has taken pity on me. Seeing that I have suffered so much from the loss of my husband and children, He has not wanted to crush me by taking this one. When I think of his complaint, I don't know who I am. I praise God for returning him to me and I beg that it should outstrip my life, and that I shall not see him unwell for as long as I live. It is a terrible pain, dreadful, believe me, to be far from someone whom one loves as much as I love him, knowing him to be ill; it is like dying on a slow fire'.⁵⁰ But Henry recovered and, on 30 October, Catherine was reunited with him at Orléans. On the 14 November she returned to Paris after an absence of nearly 18 months. Henry expressed his joy in a letter to Du Ferrier and also his gratitude for 'all the good she had sown wherever she has passed'.⁵¹ Outside Paris, the queen-mother was met by the Parlement and the people as if in tribute to her pacification of the kingdom. 'She is,' wrote the Venetian ambassador, 'an indefatigable princess, born to tame and govern a people as unruly as the French: they now recognize her merits, her concern for unity and are sorry not to have appreciated her sooner'.⁵² But the ambassador thought, rightly, that the troubles of the south had only been appeased, not solved.

⁴⁹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 7, p. 163–4.

⁵⁰ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 7, p. 134.

⁵¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 7, p. 194, n. 2; p. 195, n. 1.

⁵² Tommasco (ed.), *Relations des ambassadeurs vénitiens*, Vol. 2, pp. 449–51.

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Chapter 10

A Tiresome Brother

The English ambassador, writing from the French court in 1578, painted a picture of bitter conflict between members of the households of Henry III and his brother, François duc d'Anjou. Unable to fathom their motives, he foresaw political disaster. The situation was a far cry from the ideal of harmony to which Henry was officially committed. From the time of his accession a bitter antagonism had developed between his *mignons* and Anjou's followers. By 1578 fights between them, led by Bussy d'Amboise, became an everyday occurrence. The *mignons* aimed to deter Anjou from pursuing his military ambitions in the Netherlands.¹ Meanwhile, Catherine de' Medici and her daughter, Marguerite, tried to reconcile the factions. Marguerite, in her memoirs, blamed mutual jealousy: 'Not a day passed,' she wrote, 'without a new quarrel between them [the *mignons*] and Bussy whose courage was unequalled.'² In January, the English ambassador reported witnessing nine or 10 altercations between the king's men and Anjou's. Three days after starting a quarrel with Philibert de Gramont during a ball at the Louvre, Bussy went to the porte Saint-Antoine with 300 armed nobles, hoping to challenge him and others. A pitched battle was narrowly averted by the king, but Gramont tried to attack Bussy in his lodging. Both men were incarcerated at the Louvre, and Henry was so upset that he withdrew from public view for two days. The disturbances continued, however. On 1 February *mignons* fell upon Bussy at the porte Saint-Honoré, but he managed to give them the slip and demanded justice. A royal ordinance banned quarrels at court, and on 6 February an attempt was made by the *prévôt des marchands* to broker a reconciliation of the parties at the Hôtel de Ville.

On 2 February 1578 Anjou decided to leave the court and instructed his followers, numbering three or four hundred, to follow him, but he was persuaded, probably by his mother, to put off his departure. On 9 February the *mignon*, Saint-Luc, was married at the Louvre. Anjou refused to attend the ceremony, but turned up at a ball that evening. Maugiron seized the opportunity to insult him. Two days later, Anjou again decided to quit the court. The king and

¹ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seyssel, 2000) pp. 378–82.

² *Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois*, ed. Y. Cazaux (Paris, 1971), p. 131.

queen-mother besieged him in his room while his chief followers were locked up in the Louvre or the Bastille. At his sister's instigation, Anjou apologized to the king. His servants were set free, and Bussy and Caylus were made to embrace, but on the night of 14 February Anjou climbed out of his sister's bedchamber window followed by Simier and a valet while Bussy waited for them with horses at the abbey of Sainte-Geneviève. The duke fled to Angers, soon to be followed by his mother. She hoped to persuade him to return to Paris, but he refused even to see her. He and his entourage did not return to court till the spring of 1579. Anjou's flight was prompted, it seems, by events in the Netherlands.³



Figure 10.1 Medal with profile of François, duc d'Anjou, Henry III's younger brother and heir presumptive. The inscription reads FRANCOYS. DUC.DANJOU.ET.DALANCON. FILZ.DE.FRANCE.

Source: Photo RJK

Throughout the period from May 1576 to September 1577 Anjou had kept in close touch with the Dutch rebels, who continued to pursue him even during the sieges of La Charité and Issoire. Their revolt intensified during the summer when Philip II's governor-general, Don John of Austria, seized Namur. The Dutch States-General redoubled their efforts to win Anjou's support. Two

³ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 378–82.

agents were sent to France in October 1576 for this purpose. The situation became more complicated when Henri duc de Guise planned to offer military assistance to Don John. The States pleaded with Henry III not to allow this. The spectre of French forces fighting on opposite sides in the Dutch revolt haunted him throughout the autumn. He assured the Spanish ambassador that he had no intention of meddling in the Netherlands and did eventually forbid his subjects to take part in the revolt. To demonstrate his sincerity, he suggested that Anjou might marry Philip II's 11-year old daughter, Isabella Clara Eugenia, but the duke kept up his dialogue with William of Orange and the Dutch States. He became anxious in August 1577 when the States chose the Archduke Matthias to succeed Don John as governor-general. Soon afterwards he left Paris to raise troops in his apanage of Angers. 'They were all vagabonds, thieves and murderers,' wrote Claude Haton in his *Mémoires*, 'men who renounced God along with the worldly debts they owed. These slaughtermen were the flotsam of war, riddled with the pox and fit for the gibbet. Dying of hunger, they took to the roads and fields to pillage, assault, and ruin the people of the towns and villages, who fell into their clutches in the places where they lodged'.⁴ Henry III tried to stop their march, while Catherine lectured Anjou on the dangers facing the kingdom should he persist in his enterprise. He retorted that he could not ignore cries for help he was receiving from the Netherlands. On 12 July he arrived in Mons claiming that he had come to assist the States-General in their just quarrel. A month later, he signed a treaty with them. In exchange for his military assistance over three months, the States appointed him 'Defender of the liberty of the Netherlands against the tyranny of the Spaniards and their allies'; but this title carried no authority. Anjou swore to protect the rights of Dutch Protestants and not to attempt to separate the Catholic provinces from the rest, but his unpaid troops soon began to desert, ravaging the countryside as they went home.⁵

The 'Duel of the *Mignons*'

Anjou's flight did not bring peace to the French court as might have been expected. Henry III's *mignons* started quarrelling among themselves.⁶ At 5 a.m. on 27 April Caylus, Maugiron and Livarot met Entraguet, Ribérac and the young

⁴ F. Bourquelot (ed.), *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, p. 937.

⁵ Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 101–7.

⁶ Jean-François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Paris, 1987), pp. 151–2.

Schomberg at the horse market near the Porte Saint-Antoine. Their purpose was to resolve an essentially trivial dispute, but a pitched battle, known as the *duel des mignons*, ensued, in which Maugiron and Schomberg were killed. Ribérac, badly wounded, died next day. Livarot suffered a head wound that kept him in bed for six weeks. Only Entraguet escaped with a scratch.⁷ The duel was the first time in France that ‘seconds’ had taken part in the fighting. Using rapiers, the combatants fought in complete silence without bodily protection. The *duel of the mignons* was widely condemned by contemporary observers as an act of sacrilege. La Noue denounced it as senseless. Caylus was reported to have said ‘I renounce God!’ (*je renie Dieu!*) as he breathed his last.⁸

The king was shattered by the loss of his *mignons*. He visited Caylus at the hôtel de Boisy twice a day during the *mignon’s* protracted agony and ordered the noise of traffic outside to be muffled before stopping it altogether. The funerals he ordered for Caylus and Maugiron seemed designed to immortalize their membership of his most intimate circle. Caylus lay in state with his face uncovered, an honour normally reserved to persons of the highest rank. The king also received the court’s condolences as if a prince of the blood had died. On 21 July another *mignon*, Saint-Mégrin, was hacked to pieces by twenty or thirty men as he left the Louvre after attending the king’s *coucher*. It seems that he had offended the duc de Guise whose brother, Mayenne, commissioned the killing.⁹ Only Henry, however, mourned Saint-Mégrin, who had been universally disliked at court. He commissioned the poets, Desportes and Ronsard, to compose verses in praise of the three *mignons*, while a Latin encomium by Jean Dorat was engraved in letters of gold on the black marble at the base of their tombs. The king’s preacher, Arnauld Sorbin, who had spoken at the funerals of Anne de Montmorency, Charles IX and his daughter, did so again for the three *mignons*, thereby linking them by association with the royal family. The church of Saint-Paul where they were buried was closely associated with the House of Valois. The king made it the centre of a veritable cult of his deceased favourites. In 1580 it became an inescapable halt along the route followed by processions of penitents. Tombs of the three *mignons* were commissioned by Henry from his master-sculptor, Germain Pilon, who received a large payment for the purchase of black marble. Each tomb consisted of a sarcophagus with bulging sides resting on a narrower base. An entablature above the sarcophagus served

⁷ *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 2, pp. 188–9.

⁸ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 388–95.

⁹ L’Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 204–2005.

as a platform for the effigy of the deceased who was portrayed kneeling at a *prie-Dieu* on which rested an open Book of Hours. Bareheaded he wore armour above the waist and breeches and hose below. A helm lay by his feet. His arms were engraved on the side of the *prie-Dieu* and an armed trophy adorned the sarcophagus. The tombs no longer exist. Parisians saw them as pagan idols soiling the church, and on 2 January 1589 a mob destroyed them at the instigation of ultra-Catholic preachers.¹⁰



Figure 10.2 One of the monuments erected in the church of Saint Paul by Henry III in honour of his deceased '*mignons*' which were destroyed by a Parisian mob in 1589. Woodcut.

Source: Photo RJK.

¹⁰ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 412–16.

Elizabeth I's 'Frog'

In the autumn of 1578 Anjou revived his suit with Queen Elizabeth I of England, but she made clear that she would never marry someone she had not met. Henry III and Catherine de' Medici urged him to visit England, if only because they wanted him out of the Netherlands. Catherine even toyed with the idea of meeting Elizabeth herself in order to arrange the marriage. As she confided to the duchesse d'Uzès: 'Although our age is more suited to rest than to travel, I must go to England'.¹¹ But pacifying the Midi had to come first. On 15 February 1579 Henry III wrote to Du Ferrier: 'I hope that I shall soon have the means, God willing, to re-establish peace in my kingdom, of which I am now more hopeful than ever. This is as much because the queen my mother has written to me that she has been in conference at Nérac with the king of Navarre since the fourth of this month, for which she promises favourable results, as it is because I am assured that my brother the duc d'Anjou, having returned to my kingdom, will help me execute my intention in this respect as he has promised me and has always said and demonstrated that he is willing to do'.¹² The duke returned to Paris on 16 March and remained there for five days of 'continuous festivities and celebrations' before returning to Alençon, there to await the arrival of the queen-mother from the south. He vowed to return to Paris only if the king agreed to certain terms: he asked to enter the court with his full guard, that several of his favourites (including Bussy, Simier and La Châtre) be admitted to the king's privy council and that he be given a grant of 100,000 *livres*. 'Although these are important demands and pose some difficulty for him,' wrote the Venetian ambassador, 'the king nevertheless has such a strong desire to satisfy his brother and completely win him over, with the tranquillity of the kingdom depending on it, that he will concede this and everything else besides'.¹³ Catherine, for her part, urged Anjou to secure a marriage alliance with Elizabeth I. On 24 March she wrote to him: 'I am sure that the king will do everything in his power to help you, but you must consider that he does not have all the means that you both would like to assist your visit, seeing how the Estates have persuaded him to cut back on expenses. In order to placate them, he has had to cut out a lot of things'.¹⁴ Throughout the spring of 1579 Simier was in England trying to arrange

¹¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1943), Vol. 6, p. 337.

¹² Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 115; *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. IV, No. 3261, pp. 146–7.

¹³ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 116.

¹⁴ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 6, p. 316.

an interview between Anjou and Elizabeth. He presented the duke's demands to Elizabeth's privy council: to be crowned king of England rather than just be a consort, to have joint authority with Elizabeth over the royal estate and an annual pension of 100,000 *livres*. Some of Elizabeth's ministers were prepared to concede these terms, but in the end, the talks broke down. Even so, Anjou's planned visit to England went ahead. On 26 April he returned to Paris to confer with Henry, who was very supportive, even offering to accompany his brother to Calais. Observers were struck by the brothers' unusually close relationship. In July Anjou received a safe-conduct from Walsingham and Henry gave him 600 *écus* for his journey. On 3 August the duke left Paris for Boulogne with fewer than a dozen members of his household. Bad weather delayed his Channel crossing so that he did not reach Greenwich till 17 August. The duke travelled incognito as the seigneur de Pont de Sé. His first meeting with Elizabeth passed off amicably. He attended balls, dances, dinners and parties during the rest of his visit that ended on 29 August. Marriage was barely mentioned. But Anjou's visit provoked a wave of popular hostility in England most eloquently expressed in a pamphlet entitled *Discoverie of a Gaping Gap whereinto England is like to be swallowed by an other French marriage*. This described France as 'a den of idolatry, a kingdom of darkness, confessing Belial and serving Baal'. Sir Philip Sydney, in a famous letter to Elizabeth, tried to link Anjou to the Massacre of St. Barthomew and blamed him for the atrocities committed at La Charité and Issoire. On 4 September, following his return to France, the duke called on Henry to report on his English visit. He still believed that his marriage would take place. In late September 1579 he returned to Alençon and remained there until ordered by Henry to meet Catherine de' Medici as she returned from the Midi and escort her back to Paris. The king tried to assure everyone that he and his brother had never been on better terms, but a severe stomach disorder forced the duke early in November to retire to his château at Château-Thierry. His absence from court when the queen-mother returned in mid-November prompted rumours that the brothers had again fallen out. Anjou was, in fact, annoyed that Henry had not appointed him lieutenant-general of the kingdom. He did not return to court till December in spite of numerous attempts by Catherine to persuade him otherwise.¹⁵

In the meantime, Elizabeth I sent Simier back to France with a promise that she would marry Anjou, but only if she could get her subjects to accept the match. If this could not be done within two months, her promise would be null and void. Henry III did not underestimate the strength of English opposition to

¹⁵ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, pp. 120–27.

Anjou's marriage. 'I am well aware,' he wrote to Mauvissière, his ambassador in London, 'of the intrigues which are perpetrated to retard the marriage of my good sister and cousin, the queen of England, and my brother the duke of Anjou and it should not be doubted that such things are done expressly by the Puritans and other enemies of the said marriage, not only to retard it but to destroy it any way they can'.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, William of Orange tried to convince the Dutch States-General that Anjou's aid was vital to the success of their cause. In January 1580 they agreed to treat with him on certain conditions. He was to assure them that Henry III would support his enterprise by providing 8,000 foot and 2,000 horse. The duke readily agreed.

The situation in the Midi meanwhile deteriorated. Biron, the king's lieutenant-general in Guyenne, refused to honour some of the concessions Catherine had granted to the Huguenots at Nérac. They began to rearm. On 16 April, Catherine warned Henry that 'those of the so-called reformed religion are taking up arms everywhere'.¹⁷ On the pretext that he had never received the *sénéchaussée* of Quercy and Agenais as part of his wife's dowry, Henri de Navarre raised an army, laid siege to Cahors and captured it on 5 May. Many Catholics were massacred and their churches and homes destroyed. Henry and his mother wondered how Anjou would react. Fearing that he might be tempted to renew his alliance with the Huguenots, they sent Villeroy to find out what would satisfy him. The duke's response was to offer to mediate with the Huguenots in return for being appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom. Henry had to give way, but imposed conditions of his own. Anjou was not allowed to raise money outside his *apanage*, to open royal *lettres de cachet* or to do almost anything else without the consent of his council. Henri duc de Guise was also appointed as his deputy to ensure that he did not abuse his office. Anjou accepted these restrictions and agreed to try restore peace in the Midi. The Venetian ambassador wrote: 'Monsieur, his brother, wants peace, not caring how it is achieved, in order to make war abroad'.¹⁸ The Dutch were understandably concerned about the situation in the Midi which seemed likely to prevent the French from actively supporting their cause.

During the summer of 1580 Anjou was anxious to end the fighting in France in order to sign an agreement with the States-General. On 16 July Henry gave him 20,000 *écus*, a monthly stipend 'to cover the expenses of his travels and other

¹⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 4, pp 337–40, No. 3656.

¹⁷ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 7, p. 235.

¹⁸ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, pp. 130–31.

necessities' and permission to raise 200 horse in each territory of his apanage.¹⁹ The States-General decided to make Anjou their 'prince and lord' and sent commissioners to France to treat with him. They met him at Pléssis-les-Tours on 7 September and reported that he was preparing forces on land and sea with the secret consent of his brother, the king of France. The States wanted Henry to support Anjou openly and declare war on Philip II, but the duke's councillors explained that this would not be possible. With the Protestants still fighting in the Midi, Henry was unable to declare war on Spain even if he wanted to. In the end, a compromise was reached. Anjou undertook to secure Henry's military support and a defensive alliance between the States and France. Ratification of the treaty by the States-General was made to hinge on a public declaration of support by Henry. On 19 September 1580 the alliance was signed.²⁰

While negotiating with the Dutch commissioners, Anjou neglected the task Henry had given him of bringing peace to the Midi. In late September he travelled to Guyenne to discuss terms with Henri of Navarre. At the same time, he sent marshal de Cossé to obtain Henry's support for his venture in the Netherlands. The king told him that he did not intend to stand in his way, but that his top priority was peace in the Midi. He sent Bellièvre and Villeroy for talks with Navarre which resulted in another peace treaty, signed at Fleix on 26 November 1580, which focused on the choice of fortified towns for the Huguenots and the administration of justice.²¹ Pleased by his brother's efforts, Henry informed him on 26 December: 'I will aid and assist you with all my power, and I will join, league, and associate myself with the provinces of the Netherlands that have contracted with you, once they have effectively received and admitted you to the lordship of the said provinces, following your request to me. I hope that God will have the goodness to restore my kingdom to peace before then.'²²

Henry had no intention of assisting his brother's Dutch enterprise as long as the situation in the Midi remained threatening. He insisted on Anjou remaining in Guyenne for two months longer. Catherine, for her part, was afraid that his treaty with the Dutch States would eventually lead to war between France and Spain. She made every effort to dissuade the duke from assisting the Dutch rebels who were under siege in Cambrai. While praising the part he had played

¹⁹ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 133.

²⁰ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, pp. 134–40.

²¹ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 230–38.

²² Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 141.

in securing the peace of Fleix, she urged him to desist from his Dutch enterprise. 'I have no doubt whatsoever,' she wrote, 'that this project will not only deprive you of the glory and recognition that you have earned by your service to the king and this kingdom in the matter of the said peace, but it will also ruin the House [of Valois], bring you public hatred and ill will, and completely destroy this state. In short, it will leave me the most distressed and troubled mother who was ever born.'²³ Catherine was not even sure of Henry III's intentions. In January 1581 she warned him: 'You have neither the means nor the will to enter into a war against the king of Spain, knowing that it would be the ruin of this kingdom.'²⁴ Her fears were justified. There were signs that Henry might be prepared to assist his brother in the Netherlands. Bellièvre, who for months had tried to dissuade Anjou from his venture, now believed that he was so keen to relieve Cambrai that Henry might well support him. The king may also have felt that Anjou would be less of a nuisance abroad than at home. On 24 December 1580 Villeroy wrote to Bellièvre: 'No one knows which saint to invoke and what decision to take [and] their majesties are in great distress about it.'²⁵

In January 1580 the king of Portugal died after naming Philip II as his successor. The succession to his throne, however, was not peaceful. Only by occupying Portugal militarily was Philip able to secure his new crown. As Spanish troops were withdrawn from the Netherlands, a French intervention on the side of the Dutch rebels became more feasible. As the prospect of war with Spain loomed larger, Henry III and his mother decided in January 1581 to seek an alliance with England. This meant reviving the talks for a marriage between Anjou and Queen Elizabeth. On 20 January Henry wrote to Castelnau, his ambassador in England: 'After the repose of my kingdom there is nothing in the world that I desire more than the contentment, grandeur, welfare and advancement of my said brother with the said queen of England.'²⁶ Soon afterwards he appointed commissioners to negotiate a marriage contract based on the agreement signed by Simier and Elizabeth in November 1579. The commissioners had their first meeting with Elizabeth and her council on 24 April 1581. Although most of Elizabeth's privy councillors were prepared to discuss a defensive pact with France, only Burghley and Sussex were interested in the marriage. The talks seemed doomed: while most of Elizabeth's councillors opposed a marriage, the French commissioners had no authority to sign a

²³ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 8, pp. 304–9.

²⁴ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. 7, pp. 341–4.

²⁵ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 144.

²⁶ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 147.

defensive pact. On 11 June a marriage contract, too vague and general to satisfy anyone, was signed.

Unsure of Elizabeth's support, Henry and Catherine spent the spring of 1581 trying to persuade Anjou not to go to Cambrai, but he was as stubborn as ever. The queen-mother was angry that he had abandoned peacemaking in the Midi in order to raise troops for Cambrai's relief. Henry, too, was disturbed. The Huguenots, he wrote to Du Ferrier, were 'reacting very coldly to the execution and establishment of my edict of pacification'. In early May, as Anjou travelled north from the Midi, the king sent Catherine in a last attempt to dissuade him from aiding the Dutch rebels. A brief meeting with Anjou at Alençon on 10–11 May convinced her that nothing more could be done. On 20 May the duke made a declaration to the Parlement of Paris seeking the support of the king and his council for his Dutch venture. He insisted that he was not being disloyal to the king in accepting the offer of the Dutch States while claiming that the relief of Cambrai was vitally important for France's defence. Henry was exasperated with his brother. 'I am completely resolved,' he wrote, 'not to assist him in any way whatsoever, but, on the contrary, to hinder with every possible means the levies of troops that he has ordered.'²⁷ By early July, Anjou had assembled a large army at Château-Thierry. Most of the officers were young noblemen with little or no combat experience. As war seemed imminent, Henry forbade anyone to leave France without his permission on pain of death and confiscation of property. He worried about the future of his kingdom should Anjou die, for he was his heir. He even began to think of supporting him. While Elizabeth continued to hope for an alliance with France without a marriage, Henry wanted the reverse.²⁸ By mid-August he had come round to the view that Anjou would need to be assisted secretly. He sent him 90,000 *livres*. On 18 August the duke and his army entered Cambrai without a shot being fired, but he could go no further without financial assistance. Lacking pay, food and water, his troops were ready to go home. Elizabeth, however, came to the rescue. She sent Anjou £30,000 which allowed him to capture Câteau-Cambrésis in September 1581. The subsidy also encouraged him to return to England and meet Elizabeth a second time. The possibility of marriage was revived, but the duke's real purpose was to raise more money. Henry and Catherine welcomed this development, but on 10 September Henry told Walsingham that the marriage was the best way to guarantee French support for Anjou.

²⁷ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, pp. 151–2.

²⁸ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 154.

On 31 October 1581 Anjou, accompanied by several gentlemen of his household, crossed the Channel hoping to marry the English queen. On 15 November Henry III sent his secretary, Pinart, to England with two letters for Elizabeth. One was a simple statement of support for the marriage in the king's own hand; the other a promise to sign an offensive and defensive alliance after the union had been consummated. The king also undertook to share Anjou's costs in the Netherlands with Elizabeth. On 14 November a pact was signed. Elizabeth pledged to maintain and support Anjou in the Netherlands and he promised not to come to terms with Philip II or Parma without her approval. Marriage was not mentioned. On 22 November, however, an extraordinary scene took place in Whitehall palace. As Elizabeth and Anjou strolled through the gallery accompanied by the earl of Leicester and Walsingham, the French ambassador asked the queen what he should write to Henry regarding her marriage. She replied: 'You can write this to the king, that the duke of Anjou will be my husband'. At the same moment, she kissed Anjou on the mouth and gave him a ring taken from her finger. Anjou gave her one of his. Elizabeth then called the ladies and gentlemen who were in the gallery and repeated in a loud voice what she had previously said. The French delegation was delighted, and Anjou immediately dispatched a gentleman to Henry with the good news.²⁹ Next day, however, Elizabeth told Leicester, Hatton and Walsingham that she had no intention of marrying. Her performance on the 22 November seems to have been a ruse designed to put pressure on Henry to sign the treaty she had long desired. As for Anjou, he seems to have accepted his rejection with a shrug. He was heard to speak of 'the lightness of women and the inconstancy of islanders'.³⁰ On 23 November Henry wrote to Pinart in response to a request from Anjou for 50,000 *écus* needed for gifts he would need to make. He announced that he was sending a letter of exchange for 20,000 *écus* although he had huge expenses of his own. Pinart was to pay for gifts as they were purchased on condition the wedding took place. If this did not happen, he was not to release the money without a new command from the king. If, on the other hand, the marriage did take place, Henry would send the balance of 30,000 *écus* as he did not wish to deny anything conducive to his brother's greatness.³¹ On 26 November a Tuscan diplomat reported that Elizabeth had given Anjou a ring and that Henry was calling his brother 'king of England'. Two days later, Henry wrote to du Ferrier that Anjou had sent the seigneur de Champvallon to tell him of the warm reception

²⁹ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 161.

³⁰ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 162.

³¹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 5, No. 4391, p. 239.

he had received in England. He was 'being caressed and greatly honoured by the queen and all her subjects so that he was hopeful that his voyage would prove fruitful'. But Henry had received no letter from him or any of his companions since 10 October. Others, however, had written that on 22 November Elizabeth had declared that she would never marry another than Anjou and as a token of her promise had slipped a ring on his finger, but neither had so far written to him.³² On 4 December it was reported that Catherine de' Medici had ordered a superb bracelet to be made for Elizabeth.³³

In the meantime, Anjou spent the winter in England as Elizabeth's guest. His portrait was painted by Nicolas Hilliard and musicians like Byrd and Dowland composed works celebrating his visit.³⁴ Flattered by this attention, the duke gave Elizabeth a number of jewels including a gold locket inscribed '*Serviet eternum dulcis quem torquet Eliza*'.³⁵ Having turned down his offer of marriage, Elizabeth felt bound to satisfy his request for financial support. She decided to lend him £60,000, half to be paid within a fortnight of his leaving England and the rest two months later. He asked Burghley for £10,000 immediately, which the queen duly granted. By January 1582 it had become obvious that the Anglo-French match was off. Writing to Du Ferrier, Henry said: 'My brother is still in England pursuing his marriage, or so he writes to me, but I can have no real hope of it, seeing the delays that are employed there.'³⁶ On 1 February the duke at last left London for the Netherlands accompanied by many English lords.

Anjou's 'Finest Hour'

William of Orange greeted Anjou in Flushing on 10 February 1582. It was their first meeting. A week later the duke was met at Antwerp by the deputies to the States-General and the combined French and Dutch armies. He was given the title of 'duke of Brabant'. His installation on 19 February was to be his apotheosis. He sat on a throne covered with gold cloth and beneath a dais adorned with the arms of the Holy Roman Empire, the province of Brabant and city of Antwerp. A doctor of law acclaimed him as a resurrected duke of Burgundy. William of Orange then presented him with the vestments of a duke of Brabant: a mantle

³² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 5, No. 4403, pp. 244–5.

³³ Abel Desjardins (ed.) *Négociations de la France avec la Toscane* (Paris, 1865–72), Vol. 4, pp. 412–14.

³⁴ Roy C. Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 1963), p. 102.

³⁵ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 163, n. 89.

³⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 5, No. 4431, pp. 254–5.

and bonnet of crimson velvet lined with ermine. He was also given the gold key to the city of Antwerp. As heralds shouted ‘Long live the duke of Brabant!’, trumpets blared and coins bearing the duke’s image were thrown among the spectators. Anjou then entered the city on a white stallion and rode through streets decorated with banners and triumphal arches. That evening, after he had retired to the ducal palace, thousands of arquebuses were fired in his honour and bonfires were lit all over the city. It was Anjou’s finest hour.³⁷



Figure 10.3 The entry into Antwerp of Francois, duc d'Alencon et Anjou, from 'La ioyeuse [et] magnifique entrée de monseigneur Francoys, fils de France, et frere unique du roy, par la grace de dieu, duc de Brabant, d'Anjou, Alencon, Berri, [et]c. en sa tres-renomée ville d'Anvers' (Antwerp, 1582)

Source: © The British Library Board (Shelfmark: c.22.c.12).

³⁷ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, pp. 166–8.

Anjou now had the unenviable task of fighting the Spaniards led by the formidable duke of Parma. As long as he had English lords with him, he could feel confident of Elizabeth's support, but he worried about the lukewarm assistance he was getting from France. Soon after his installation, he wrote to several prominent Frenchmen urging them to support his military campaign. Peace in France, he argued, depended on defeating Spain in the Netherlands. And this was not his only concern. He was shocked to find that Catholic worship was banned in Antwerp. He even threatened to go home and only relented after William of Orange had persuaded the city council to allow Catholic worship in one church. The duke also complained that he had not yet received the money promised at Plessis-lès-Tours. He had alienated so much of his apanage to raise troops that his revenue was much reduced. Anjou begged Henry III to come to his aid, but the king was anxious not to provoke Spain into declaring war on France. On 8 April he wrote to Du Ferrier: 'I will continue to do everything I can to persuade him to leave the Netherlands before he suffers the fickleness of its people'.³⁸ In mid-May, however, he sent Bellièvre to Antwerp with a promise of 100,000 *écus*. He was instructed to tell Anjou that Henry would have liked to send more, but could not afford to do so. When Bellièvre returned to France late in June, he drew a pitiful picture of Anjou's army and urged Henry to increase his support. Anjou was a poor commander and most of his officers were inexperienced, but the main reason for his helplessness was the States' failure to honour its promise of financial support.³⁹

On 6 June Anjou told Bellièvre that his troops were about to mutiny. 'If money is not delivered promptly,' he wrote, 'I will be ruined.' He begged Henry to send him 50,000 *écus* that he had promised in May. The king did so, but the money provided only a brief respite. Early in August, Anjou asked Bellièvre for more cash. In September, Elizabeth sent another £15,000, but this was to be her last payment. Henry also sent 193,500 *livres*, but Orange reckoned that Anjou needed half a million *livres* per month. By late autumn, the duke had only about 3,000 men camped outside Antwerp. They were soon reduced to begging for alms. 'Everything is falling apart in ruin,' he wrote to Bellièvre, 'and the worst part of it is that I was given hopes which have led me too far to back down now'.⁴⁰

On 27 November the States agreed to provide four million *livres* per year to finance the war. Anjou's hopes now rested on the arrival of French reinforcements led by marshal Biron and the duc de Montpensier. They arrived on 1 December

³⁸ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 5, No. 4507, p. 280.

³⁹ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 173.

⁴⁰ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 179.

but could do nothing to feed the duke's army. Many died of hunger and cold during the winter as the States failed to honour their latest promise. On 13 January 1583 Anjou appealed to them for the last time. They replied apologetically, but rejected his suggestion that they should turn themselves into an English Parliament. The duke's response was to attack Antwerp but the citizens were ready. About a thousand French soldiers were killed and several hundred taken prisoner. After fleeing to Berchem with the remnants of his army, Anjou wrote to the States-General and William of Orange blaming the indignities that had been heaped upon him for the sad turn of events.

In Paris, news of the 'French fury' was received with shock.⁴¹ Henry III feared for his brother's life while Catherine de' Medici at first refused to believe the news. But the truth was soon confirmed. The loss of 400 French noblemen caused intense grief. No one knew what to expect. Villeroy advised Henry to strengthen his army immediately. William of Orange, meanwhile, urged the States-General to negotiate with Anjou. He submitted proposals which even Orange dismissed as unacceptable. The States submitted counter-proposals and, in January 1583, gave him 43,451 *livres*. But what Anjou needed was control of a North Sea port where he might receive aid from France and England and from which he might escape if need be. Henry III, for his part, sent the seigneur de Vannes to the duke of Parma in the hope of averting a Spanish counter-offensive. He was instructed to remind Parma of Henry's numerous attempts to dissuade Anjou from going to the Netherlands. He promised to coax his brother to come home if he could be assured of a free and safe passage across the frontier. On 7 February Henry sent the sieur de Mirambeau to the States to express his regret of the so-called 'French fury' in Antwerp and to urge the deputies not to allow Parma to take advantage of the situation. 'My said brother...' Henry wrote to Castelnau on 14 February, 'has gone to Flanders against my advice and counsel, as you well know, and neither I nor the queen mother ever had any knowledge or inkling of that deed in Antwerp, which I swear before God. But seeing my said brother so entangled at present, as I understand that he is, I have decided to do what I can to assist him and to help preserve his life, which is so dear to me, and also to aid and bring home those of my subjects who are with him.'⁴² Bellièvre returned to the Netherlands in an attempt to mend Anjou's relations with the States. He carried 15,000 *livres* from the queen-mother and 150,000 *livres* from Henry. On 18 March Anjou agreed to terms offered by the States in return for permission to move to Dunkirk. The States paid

⁴¹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 67–70.

⁴² Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 188.

him 85,000 *livres* and marshal Biron 13,300 *livres*. Somewhat reluctantly, the latter agreed to lead an army to the relief of Eindhoven which Parma was besieging, but he was too late: Eindhoven capitulated on 23 April. Relations between Anjou and the States became so strained that Catherine de' Medici decided to meet him in Calais. Anjou was glad of an excuse to quit Dunkirk. In the meantime, Biron's unpaid troops threatened to desert. 'If things continue as they are,' he wrote, 'both [Anjou and the States] can look for another valet to take my place, because from the end of July you will not find me around here.'⁴³ In June, as Parma marched south, Anjou fled from Dunkirk hoping to meet his mother in Calais but she was held up at Mézières and only met him on 12 July at Chaulnes near Péronne. He begged his mother to give him 60,000 *écus* in order to raise new levies in France. She agreed to some future payment as long as it was only used to bring the French army home. On 16 July Dunkirk fell to Parma. Biron blamed the States. 'The fact is,' he wrote to Catherine on 21 July, 'Monseigneur your son has been very badly and most unworthily served.'⁴⁴ Anjou remained in Picardy throughout the summer trying to raise new levies. Although unwell, Catherine met him again at La Fère. She reprimanded him for disobeying the king and promised him money if he would come home at once. She told him that Henry had summoned a council meeting in September and wanted Anjou and Biron to attend in order to explain the situation in the Netherlands. Biron returned home as soon as he learnt of the meeting. Anjou returned to Cambrai. By now his health was declining.

The historian, J.L. Motley, described Anjou as 'the most despicable personage who had ever entered the Netherlands'. The duke had many failings, but, as Holt has shown, 'Anjou's principal problem throughout his stay in the Netherlands was lack of sufficient funds to pay his army'.⁴⁵ Henry III was partly to blame. He gave Anjou only 2 per cent of his regular income whereas Elizabeth gave him more than 25 per cent of hers. Despite their constant pleas of poverty, Henry and Catherine spent frivolously much larger sums than they gave to Anjou. But the duke was mainly let down by the States-General. From the moment of his installation as duke of Brabant it became clear that they would be unable to honour the promise of financial support which they had made at Plessis-lès-Tours in September 1580. But even if he had received it all, he would probably not have defeated Parma's army. 'One can only conclude,' writes Holt, 'that it

⁴³ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 191.

⁴⁴ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, pp. 192–3.

⁴⁵ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 195.

was utter stupidity to attempt such a venture, and that Anjou thought it might succeed is a sign of gross military incompetence'.⁴⁶

Illness prevented Anjou from attending the opening session of the Assembly of Notables which Henry held at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 18 November 1583 to consider ways of dealing with the crown's financial crisis. Catherine de' Medici, who visited him earlier in the month, reported that he was being purged because of 'the great sweat that he had'. Yet the duke kept abreast of the situation in the Netherlands. His troops still held Cambrai. An agent of Parma called on him at Château-Thierry to discuss a possible settlement. He seems to have used the talks to put pressure on Henry to pay the garrison in Cambrai. The king did send 50,000 *écus* for that purpose. Parma's agent left Château-Thierry empty-handed in early December and the States soon sent representatives to Anjou in order to negotiate a new treaty. But they were only prepared to do this if Henry would openly support their cause. They wanted him to close all French ports to Spanish shipping and to cease all trade with Spain and her allies. But Anjou told the States that his brother could not declare war on Spain.

On 10 February 1584 Anjou returned to Paris where he was warmly received by Henry. They had not seen each other for nearly three years and both wept openly. From 10 to 21 February they paraded publicly in Paris and St. Germain-en-Laye. 'I praise God from the bottom of my heart,' wrote Catherine, 'to see them so happy together, which can only be for the welfare and prosperity of the affairs of this kingdom'.⁴⁷ We do not know what the brothers discussed, but, according to L'Estoile, Henri gave Anjou 100,000 *écus*.⁴⁸ Observers were astonished to see them so happily reconciled. On 21 February, as the duke left Paris, Catherine wrote to Bellièvre that her sons were 'so satisfied with each other that I have great occasion to praise God and to hope for peace and contentment for the rest of my days. And I assure you that this has greatly assisted the recovery of my health and the departure of my fever, which was brought on by the worry and sadness that I experienced throughout their separation'.⁴⁹ On his return to Château-Thierry, Anjou wrote to William of Orange that Henry was willing to support his Dutch enterprise publicly, but urged the States to act quickly. On 14 March however, they informed him that Parma had laid siege to Ypres and begged him to join his forces with theirs without delay.

⁴⁶ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 200.

⁴⁷ *Lettres de Catherine de' Medici*, Vol. VIII, p. 174.

⁴⁸ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 133.

⁴⁹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Vol. VIII, p. 175.

Meanwhile, in France, Henry III was becoming increasingly anxious: he still had no son to succeed him on the throne of France and the next in line was Henri de Navarre, who, as a Protestant, was unacceptable to most French people. They seemed likely to resist him by force. It was doubtless in the hope of averting such a catastrophe that Henry and 47 White penitents set off from Paris on 9 March 1584 on a pilgrimage to two shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary.⁵⁰ They reached Notre-Dame de Chartres on 13 March and, next day, moved on to Notre-Dame de Cléry, near Orléans, arriving there on the 17 March. Five days later they returned, exhausted, to Paris. At the same time, Henry tried to draw closer to Henri of Navarre. On 16 February he had a secret meeting with Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, one of Navarre's chief councillors, and in March he congratulated d'Entragues, the governor of Orléans, on having calmed the Huguenots whose fears had been maliciously aroused. He urged him to continue doing so, as he himself only wanted to ensure that his kingdom remained at peace. At the same time Henry tried to get Navarre to convert. At the end of April he declared in public that he liked his cousin and was prepared to recognize him as his sole heir.

By mid-March Anjou had a relapse. He was running a fever and vomiting blood. Catherine rushed to Château-Thierry as doctors worked frantically to save her son's life. On 19 March she wrote to Villeroy: 'My son was supposed to be bled this morning, but he slept so late and awoke so refreshed that the doctors decided to take another look at him tomorrow, hoping that he will be better and that maybe they will not have to bleed him.'⁵¹ But Anjou's condition got steadily worse. His doctors diagnosed the same lung disorder that had killed Charles IX. In mid-April Anjou wrote to his mother and sister that his health had improved. He even attempted to continue his talks with deputies of the States-General. On 25 April they signed a new treaty at Delft with Anjou's representative, the seigneur des Pruneaux. It gave the duke a stronger hand in the Netherlands, but to no purpose. On 26 April he had another fever and vomited blood. By early June he was too weak to leave his bed. On 8 June he dictated his last will and testament. The opening words were addressed to the king: 'One of the greatest regrets I have, my Lord, is that I have irritated and displeased you by my actions and undertakings. So many of them were from a desire to pacify your kingdom and to protect it from foreign invasion more than any other single ambition. This is the principal reason why I beseech you to forgive me, as

⁵⁰ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 134.

⁵¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Medicis*, Vol. 8, p. 177.

I requested the last time I had the good fortune to see you'.⁵² On Sunday 10 June Anjou died. Henri III received the news at St. Maur-les-Fossés that evening. He asked marshal Biron to fetch his brother's body at Château-Thierry and bring it back to Paris. A post-mortem examination revealed that Anjou had almost certainly died of disseminated tuberculosis. Late that evening, his body was embalmed and placed in a lead coffin. His heart, which had been removed previously, was placed in a small box. The funeral cortège left Château-Thierry on 19 June for Paris where it was laid to rest in the church of Saint Magloire where royal corpses were traditionally deposited on the way to their final resting place at Saint-Denis.

The duke's death offered Henry III the opportunity to stage one of those great ceremonies which seem to have appealed to his love of the macabre. He himself laid down the order of the funeral service. On 24 June, the feast of St. John, the king went to sprinkle holy water on the coffin. He wore a large violet cloak whose train was held up by eight noblemen. The king's archers surrounded him holding craped halberds. They wore black doublets, hose, bonnets and hats. Ahead marched the Swiss troops to the accompaniment of muted drums. Also in the procession were courtiers with hoods, cardinals in violet vestments and bishops in scapulars. Then, sitting alone in a carriage, came the queen, and behind her eight carriages filled with ladies, all in deep mourning. On 25 June the duke's body was taken to Notre-Dame in a procession through the capital which lasted five hours. Henry watched it from an open window that overlooked the *parvis* of Notre Dame where he could be seen by everyone. With him were the duc de Guise, Liancourt, the *Premier écuyer* and Villeroy his secretary.⁵³ Walking slowly in front of the bier were members of the city's corporations wearing black robes, knights of the king's Order, bishops, ambassadors, councillors of the Parlement. Lords and aldermen held the ropes of the canopy. Anjou's effigy 'taken from life' was carried on the shoulders of the salt-carriers. Around it were 200 poor each holding a wax torch. The 23 town criers rang small bells. The royal guards in long robes held lowered arquebuses wrapped in crape. Archers wielding black rods controlled the crowd of onlookers. Each house along the processional route displayed a burning torch by royal command. One thousand, two hundred shields bearing the duke's coat of arms paid for by the city of Paris were carried in the procession or nailed to the city's gates. The bishop of Paris celebrated high mass in the presence of the royal family. Renaud de Beaune, archbishop

⁵² Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 210.

⁵³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 141.

of Bourges, gave the funeral address. According to L'Estoile 'he said nothing worth listening to and he never did so badly in his whole life'.⁵⁴

After the ceremony at Notre-Dame, the procession formed up again to carry Anjou's body to the basilica of Saint-Denis for its burial on the 27 June in the Rotunda of the Valois. Once again Henry watched the procession from an open window, this time of a house in the rue Saint-Denis. At the entrance to the crypt, the duke's officials came one by one to deposit the arms, spurs, gauntlets and baton that symbolized the power of their deceased master.⁵⁵ Anjou's death was hugely significant. 'Their Majesties and all of France are saddened,' wrote Villeroy, 'and with good reason since the king has no children.'⁵⁶ Marshal Biron was equally apprehensive. 'This loss has caused a great deal of sorrow,' he wrote, '[and] those who understand politics predict that his death could bring harm to our France. L'Estoile was equally pessimistic. 'This prince,' he wrote, '...did not like those of the house of Lorraine whose hearts swelled as his death occurred at the right time for them, facilitating and advancing the designs of their League, which began to grow as France began to decline'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 142.

⁵⁵ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), pp. 489–90.

⁵⁶ Holt, *The Duke of Anjou*, p. 211.

⁵⁷ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 142.

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Chapter 11

The Court of Henry III

The reign of Henry III marks an important stage in the evolution of the royal court in France. In the first half of the sixteenth century it retained much of the character and life-style of the medieval court though it was now much larger and women played a more prominent role than in the past. It remained nomadic as it had been throughout the Middle Ages. Except in winter, when the roads turned into quagmires and rivers froze or burst their banks, it was almost continually on the move. There were several reasons for this. In an age devoid of media, it was politically sensible for the king to see and be seen by as many of his subjects as possible. This was why Catherine de' Medici took Charles IX on a 'Grand Tour' of France in 1564. It was to reinforce the authority he had just acquired on coming of age.¹ It was usual for a king to be given a 'joyous entry' by the citizens of a town he was visiting for the first time. Whereas a coronation or royal funeral was seen by relatively few people, an entry could be repeated several times and in many places so that many more people would see him. The king was presented with the keys of the town before riding under a canopy through streets that had been cleaned and decorated in his honour. At various points along the processional route, he was often greeted by temporary triumphal arches. Made of wood covered with canvas, they might carry plaster statues of biblical or mythological figures and inscriptions praising the monarch and his rule. Theatrical displays, commonly in the form of *tableaux vivants*, were also put on for his benefit at various open spaces along the route. The procession invariably ended at the main church where a *Te Deum* was sung, underscoring the divine nature of the king's rule and its close ties with the Catholic church.² Another

¹ Pierre Champion, *Catherine de Médicis présente à Charles IX son royaume, 1564–1566* (Paris, 1937); Jean Boutier, Alain Dewerpe and Daniel Nordman, *Un tour de France royal: Le Voyage de Charles IX (1564–1566)* (Paris, 1984).

² Robert J. Knecht, 'Court Festivals as Political Spectacle: the Example of Sixteenth-century France' in *Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe*, ed. J.R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Margaret Shewring (Aldershot, 2004), Vol. 1, pp. 19–31; Lawrence M. Bryant, *The King and the City in the Parisian Royal Entry Ceremony: Politics, ritual and art in the Renaissance* (Geneva, 1986).

powerful reason for the court's nomadic life-style was hunting, a favourite royal occupation in peacetime.³

The court was a political institution. Although some important departments of state, notably the Parlement or highest court of justice under the king, had 'gone out of court' during the Middle Ages and had settled in Paris, others, including the king's council, where major policy decisions were taken, and the chancery, which was responsible for drawing up legislation, remained with the king, so that France could be said to have two capitals: Paris and the court. Under Henry III the court travelled far less than before. Although he did hunt from time to time, he was less keen on the sport than Francis I had been. Nor did he share the latter's willingness to put up with rustic discomfort. Henry's freedom to travel was also limited by political circumstances: for almost half his reign he was at war with some of his subjects, and after 1576 he was too poor to travel. Preferring urban to rural life, he spent far more time in and around Paris than his predecessors. Whereas Francis I had spent a total of 1,291 days in Paris over 32 years, Henry spent 1,602 days there over nine years. When he did travel, he ranged less widely than his predecessors had done. He spent a total of 237 days at Blois, 139 at Fontainebleau and 81 at Saint-Germain.⁴ It follows that he visited relatively few provincial towns and was consequently given fewer entries. When the court did travel, houses were requisitioned by the *maréchaux des logis* and the *fourriers*, marked and allocated to courtiers who were each given a ticket (*billet de logement*). Lodgings nearest the king were given to the princes and princesses who normally lived at the Louvre. Disputes sometimes occurred. At Meaux, in 1587, for example, the duc d'Épernon occupied a house next to the king's that had been reserved for the cardinal de Bourbon and princess of Lorraine.⁵ Henry III often changed residence without taking his household staff with him. He would stay at the house of a well-to-do townsman or at an inn. In September and October 1587 he spent 49 *écus* in a number of towns at the rate of one *écu* for a house and two for an inn.⁶ But his moves were for the most part limited to the Île-de-France. He liked to go to the manor of Ollainville, south of Paris, which he bought in 1576. Here, he could escape from the hurly-burly of the court. He settled there on 20 October 1577 with 'his troop of young *mignons*'. Three years

³ Philippe Salvadori, *La Chasse sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1996).

⁴ Monique Chatenet, *La Cour de France au XVI^e siècle: vie sociale et architecture* (Paris, 2002), p. 323.

⁵ René de Lucinge, *Lettres de 1587*, ed. James J. Supple (Geneva, 1994), p. 212.

⁶ Nicolas Le Roux, *Le Roi, la Cour, l'État. De la Renaissance à l'Absolutisme* (Seyssel, 2013), p. 51.

later we find him there with O, La Valette and Arques. In the 1580s Joyeuse and his brother, the comte de Bouchage, had apartments at Ollainville. Henry also used to escape to the château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, but he seldom visited the château of Madrid in the Bois-de-Boulogne. People who needed to see him were often annoyed as they tried to pin him down; but Henry was not the first French king to be elusive: Francis I was always disappearing in forests on hunting expeditions accompanied by his 'little band' of companions.

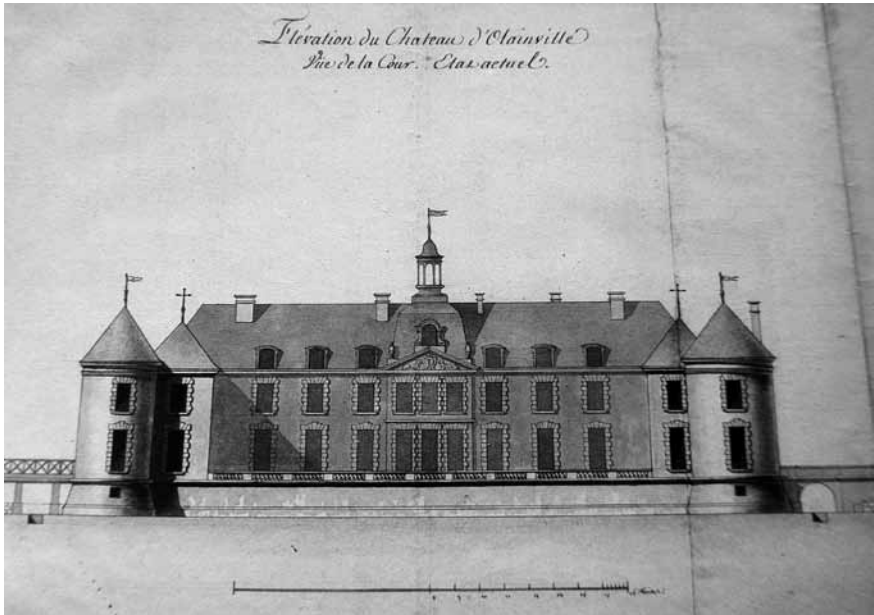


Figure 11.1 The manor of Ollainville (Essonne) as it was in the eighteenth century. Henry III acquired it in 1576 and went there from time to time with a few friends. It was destroyed in 1831.

Source: Photo RJK.

Unlike Francis I, Henry built little. As Lippomano noted in 1577: 'The king does not like to build: first, the wars have cost him too much, then he prefers to give money to his servants so that they themselves should build; which is what several French lords are doing at present with a remarkable profusion.'⁷

⁷ Nicolo Tommaseo, *Relations des ambassadeurs vénitiens sur les affaires de France* (Paris, 1838), Vol. 2, pp. 380–82.

When Henry III was in Paris, he resided at the Louvre which was still being transformed from a medieval fortress into a palace. The process had begun under Francis I who had the medieval keep destroyed so as to open up the courtyard. The construction of a new palace, designed by the architect Pierre Lescot, began in 1546 and was incomplete under Henry III. For this reason, foreign observers were unimpressed by the Louvre; they much preferred Fontainebleau. Much of the present-day Louvre dates from the following century. All that Lescot built before his death in 1578 was the west wing and the *pavillon du roi*. The south wing was completed later by Baptiste du Cerceau. The west wing, which had two floors and an attic, contained two *salles*. The *salle des caryatides* on the ground floor had a raised platform or *tribunal* at one end and a musicians' gallery supported by caryatids carved by Jean Goujon at the other. A staircase, dog-legged and vaulted, led from this hall to another, known as the *salle haute* or *salle des gardes*, on the first floor. This preceded the king's apartment which consisted initially of an antechamber, presence chamber and private rooms. The presence chamber had a remarkable ceiling made by the woodcarver, Francisque Scibec de Carpi, and doors carved by Jean Goujon. A passage across the moat enabled the king to go from his chamber to a terrace overlooking the garden. The queen's apartment occupied the first floor of the south wing. The external façades of the *pavillon du roi* and south wing disappeared when the wing was enlarged in 1668. Fortunately, the courtyard façades have survived with their bas-reliefs by Jean Goujon and his assistants which are among the finest masterpieces of the French Renaissance.⁸

The court was not a single organism but an amalgam of several households which would at times detach themselves from the main body. There was also a large floating population. Many people who did not belong to the household staff visited the court on state business, including councillors, masters of requests, notaries and secretaries. There were also permanent or semi-permanent guests, such as princes of the blood, foreign princes, prelates and ambassadors, each with his own suite. As the court travelled around the kingdom, noblemen from one region would tag on for a few days or weeks, then go home. They seldom stayed for long as life at court was expensive and even the greatest lords needed from time to time to attend to their own homes. Court officials served on a quarterly basis; they remained with the king only a few months at a time. Also at court were numerous hangers-on, including merchants and artisans, who were exempted from tolls and guild regulations as long as they served only

⁸ David Thomson, *Renaissance Paris* (London, 1984), pp. 84–97; Henri Zerner, *Renaissance Art in France: The invention of Classicism* (Paris, 2003), pp. 144–77.

the crown, and camp followers (*filles de joie suivant la cour*) who traditionally received a New Year gift from the king. Socially, the court was very mixed, every rank in society, except the peasantry, being represented. The nobility was by no means dominant. Many non-nobles tried to raise their status by securing offices at court which, in theory, could only be held by nobles. Some court offices were monopolized by a limited number of noble families. Henry III doubled the number of such offices from around 500 under Charles IX to 1,000 or so, his aim being to bring the nobility as a whole closer to the monarchy.

The court's heart was the king's household, which was divided into a number of departments catering for his various needs. The principal ones were the chapel, the chamber and the *hôtel*. The chapel, under the Grand Almoner (*Grand aumônier*), attended to the king's spiritual needs. It was also responsible for alms-giving, charities and even certain hospitals. The chapel was sub-divided into the almonry, the *chapelle de musique* whose choristers sang in high masses, and the oratory (*oratoire*) for low masses. The chamber was administered by the Great chamberlain (*Grand chambellan*) or First Gentleman of the Chamber (*Premier gentilhomme de la chambre*). He oversaw the king's *lever* and *coucher*, his personal toilette, clothes and furnishings. The chamber staff included a number of gentlemen (*gentilshommes de la chambre*), who became very numerous under Henry III. A total of between 650 and 700 served during his reign as compared with 99 under Charles IX. The chamber staff also included valets and a number of officials, who looked after the king's clothes as well as a tailor, a cobbler, a furrier, a tapestry-worker, a painter and a carpenter. Physicians, a surgeon and apothecaries looked after the king's health and a barber after his toilette. State business was entrusted to a team of notaries and secretaries. A regulation of 1585 provided for the full participation of secretaries of state in the deliberations of *Conseil d'état* and *Conseil privé*. Until 1588 they continued to take their oath of office before the chancellor, but in that year they began taking it before the king himself. Villeroy, who served as secretary of state under five kings, says in his memoirs that he was never more than an executive officer, but actually he was a minister. He and other secretaries are known to have taken decisions. In 1588 new secretaries of state were forbidden to open dispatches or write letters under their own signature, but they received demands for favours and gifts and drew up lists of beneficiaries for the king to sign. The secretaries employed a large staff who, in addition to their normal remuneration, hoped to be found places at court.⁹

⁹ N.M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State in the Age of Catherine de Medici* (London, 1962), pp. 185–308.

The *hôtel* was mainly concerned with feeding the king and his entourage. At its head was the Grand Master (*Grand Maître*), who had to keep up-to-date the roll of its staff and to assemble them on the first month of each quarter. He was expected to stand alongside the king at his meals and allowed his own table with some 20 guests. The *hôtel* was subdivided into departments that provided bread, wine and fruit respectively. The *cuisine de bouche* fed the king and the *cuisine du commun* all those officials who could claim board and lodging at court (*domestiques et commensaux du roi*). The *fourrière*, under the *Grand maréchal des logis*, had the daunting task of transporting the court and finding accommodation for its members. The stables were one of the court's most important services. They were run by the Master of the Horse (*Grand écuyer*), *Premier Écuyer* and their staff of grooms (*écuyers*). In 1582, the stables were divided into great and small stables (*Grande écurie* and *Petite écurie*). They looked after the warhorses used in tournaments and war as well as the horses and mules that pulled litters, carts and the coaches that were becoming popular towards the end of the century. Attached to the stables were the messengers (*chevaucheurs*), who carried the king's mail. There was also a riding school for pages (*enfants d'honneur*) who helped to serve his meals. The *vénerie* and *fauconnerie* shared the task of organizing the king's hunts.

Alongside the royal household was a military establishment made up of units created in different reigns. The troops attached to Henry III's household numbered 2,650 in 1579. They comprised a company of *archers de la Porte*, two companies of *Cent gentilshommes*, four of one hundred *gardes du corps*, another of *Cent Suisses* and a regiment of *gardes françaises*. The *Capitaine de la Porte* kept the keys to the royal residence. Law and order at court was the responsibility of the *Prévôt de l'Hôtel* with his staff consisting of three lieutenants and 30 archers. He could punish crimes committed in a royal residence or within five miles of the king's person. On a royal progress, he was expected to ensure adequate supplies by requisition, if necessary, and to prevent overcharging by victuallers. The captains of the guard also helped to maintain order. When the king attended mass, they had to ensure that the congregation remained silent. During Henry's meals, they were to prevent people from getting too close to his table and after its removal, they were to sort out the people who wished to meet him. Archers, stationed in the halls and staircases, were expected to discipline pages and lackeys and to stifle blasphemous talk. The household's finances were administered by the *Chambre aux deniers* whose annual budget was subject to the approval of the *Chambre des comptes*, but the king's privy purse (*menus plaisirs*) escaped this control.

Henry III's court varied in size according to circumstances. A return to civil war or an outbreak of plague would cause it to disperse in panic. Its population, even allowing for variations, was comparable to that of a French town of average size. In 1577 the Venetian ambassador, Lippomano, estimated it as comprising 8,000 persons and 6,000 horses. Henry's household comprised 1,064 domestic officials in 1572–74 and 1096 in 1584. In addition, there were various guards. In 1579, they consisted of 150 Scots, 800 French, 1500 Swiss and 200 halberdiers. The *prévôté de l'hôtel* employed 99 persons in 1585, the hunting departments 312 in 1584, and the stables 170 in 1588. The overall number of persons serving the king's person in 1584–88 (excluding government officials) was 4,117. The queen's household was much smaller: 297 in 1575 and 285 in 1589. Alençon's household grew hugely after the peace of Beaulieu (1576) to 925, then fell back to 520 in 1583. While the king's household grew moderately between 1574 and 1589, that of the queen-mother exploded: from 371 (including 55 guards) in 1569 to 666 (without guards) in 1585.

The court's size was a matter of concern to contemporaries. The great ordinance of Blois called for a roll to be kept of all the king's *commensaux* (people entitled to eat at his expense), but this was not done. The Third Estate in 1576 complained that there were too many women and nobles at court. Henry tried to reduce the number of petitioners and court officials. He wrote to the duc de Joyeuse, who was governor of Normandy, suggesting that the town of Rouen did not need to employ so many people to defend its interests at court; only one bourgeois or merchant being needed. If other towns followed suit, he added, they would be spared much expense 'and myself much useless importuning'. Attempts were made to reduce the court's size. There were 33 *maîtres d'hôtel* in 1574 and only 22 in 1584; 17 king's physicians in 1574 and only nine in 1584. Some posts were not filled when their occupants died, yet the overall number of domestic servants in the king's household rose by 1584. Henry divided them into two categories: those in receipt of wages and those who were unpaid but had privileges.

A court that was as large as a medium-sized French town could not be wholly accommodated in a single royal palace. According to a Venetian ambassador the Louvre under Henry III could easily accommodate the king, his brother, the queen, the queen-mother, the queen of Navarre, two cardinals, two dukes and their wives, three princesses of the blood, many favourites and ladies and a number of councillors. Regulations issued in 1585 laid down that royal office-holders (*officiers de la couronne*), privy councillors, the *surintendant des finances*, secretaries of state and the queens' doctors should be housed in the *basse-cour*

of the Louvre. Apartments were occupied not only by the lords and ladies to whom they were assigned but also by their servants. At least three women slept in Marguerite de Valois's chamber. The first gentleman of the king's chamber was expected to sleep there and its valets in the *cabinet* that adjoined it. In June 1587 the duc d'Épernon slept in the king's chamber on three consecutive nights. Henry even shared his bed with him in April 1587. Though unusual, such intimacy was not unprecedented: Henry II had shared his bed with the Constable of Montmorency in 1547. Henry III also shared his bed with his brother, Anjou, following the latter's return to court after one year's absence. Each of the First gentlemen of the king's chamber – Villequier, Joyeuse and Épernon – had an apartment consisting of *salle*, a chamber, a *cabinet* and a wardrobe. Joyeuse lived for several months at the Louvre early in 1582 following his marriage to the queen's half-sister. The king even ordered a gallery to be made leading from his *cabinet* to Joyeuse's apartment. In June 1582 he bought the duke a Parisian hôtel for 40,000 *livres*, but the duke was back at the Louvre in September 1587.

Most of the court's domestic officials lived in Paris where they rented or owned lodgings. As from the 1570s members of the nobility resided near the Louvre, in the Marais or in the faubourg Saint-Germain. But the largest aristocratic houses, such as those of the Guise or Montmorency, which were like miniature fortresses, were situated near the old palace of the Tournelles. As Henry III settled in Paris more or less permanently, his courtiers acquired properties near the Louvre and some undertook extensive building operations. Albert de Gondi-Retz, for example, built a stable block and a long gallery. He also created a garden with a grotto and erected a monumental gateway flanked by two pavilions. Major works were also undertaken by Villequier on a house he had purchased near the Louvre.

As the court became more static under Henry III, it acquired a more closely regulated life-style consistent with his exalted view of monarchy. The king of France in the early sixteenth century had been easily accessible. An ordinance of 1523 claimed that 'a greater conglutination, bond and conjunction of true love, pure devotion, cordial harmony and intimate affection have always existed between the kings of France and their subjects than in any other monarchy or Christian nation.'¹⁰ Access to the court was easy: anyone decently dressed or who could claim acquaintance with a member of the royal entourage was admitted. The king was allowed no privacy, not even at meal times. His table was often set up in a hall large enough to admit the public. As Frenchmen watched him eat, they could imagine themselves sharing his private life. Admission to a

¹⁰ Gaston Zeller, *Les institutions de la France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1948), p. 97.

royal palace was also surprisingly easy. At the Louvre, only access to the inner courtyard on horseback, in a litter or carriage, was forbidden, excepting the royal family or princes of the blood. Security was not easily maintained. In 1561 a Venetian envoy wrote about Francis II: 'No one is excluded from his presence. Lackeys and people of the lowest sort dare to enter the king's secret cabinet to see what is going on there and to eavesdrop ... This great familiarity, it is true, makes the subjects insolent, but at the same time it engages their loyalty and devotion to the king'.¹¹

Not much is known about etiquette at the French court in the early sixteenth century but architecture points to a tightening up during the century. It was under Henry II that the words *antichambre* and *appartement* first entered the French language. The first occurs in a contract for the Louvre of 1551 and the second in a sonnet of 1558 by Joachim Du Bellay. The antechamber, like so much else, was an Italian import. The great Italian architect, Serlio, designed one for Cardinal Ippolito d'Este at the Grand Ferrare and another at Ancy-le-Franc. Under Henry II, antechambers appeared at the Louvre, Fontainebleau and in three other royal châteaux. The earliest known court regulation explaining their use dates from the reign of Henry III. The antechamber was where courtiers waited to see the king and watched him dine. It offered noblemen a means of escaping the hoi-polloi. Ushers would sort them out at the door. They would then regroup in the antechamber before being called upon to enter the royal chamber or more comfortably await the king's daily appearance on his way to mass; but under Henry III the antechamber also served as a dining room. A regulation of 1578 lays down that the usher must guard the door of the *salle* or antechamber 'if the king dines in his antechamber'. A notarial act of 1584 refers to the balustrade protecting the king's table in the antechamber at the Louvre.¹²

The introduction of the antechamber in the royal apartment had two consequences: it increased the distance separating the king from his courtiers and drew a line between those who entered the chamber, those who waited in the antechamber and others relegated to the *salle*. It may have been towards the end of Francis I's reign that access to the royal chamber was first regulated. By the second half of the century it had become a privilege to be invited to the king's *lever* and *coucher*. At a fixed time each morning, the princes of the blood, principal domestic officials and council members were admitted to his chamber. The king was handed his shirt by the most distinguished person present. Once he was dressed, persons of lesser rank, who had been waiting in the antechamber,

¹¹ Zeller, *Les institutions de la France*, p. 97.

¹² Chatenet, *La Cour de France*, pp. 179–84.

were admitted, and he would talk to them. He would then pray at a portable altar that was set up each day in his chamber. A similar etiquette was observed in the evening for his *coucher*. This ceremonial is unlikely to have been strictly followed every day, especially when the court was on the move and accommodation was difficult to come by.¹³ Under Henry III, however, court etiquette became tighter. He drew up a list of those people who were to hand him his serviette at each meal. He strongly objected to any activity at court likely to detract from his dignity. Thus, he banned cooking in his residence. Anyone who disobeyed was to be expelled. Yet Henry continued to eat *en public*.

One of Henry III's major concerns was security. This was no easy matter given the court's large population. Disorder was rife. An English ambassador noted in 1575 that there were daily quarrels outside the king's chamber. On 28 February Henry created the office of *Grand Prévôt de l'Hôtel* for François du Plessis-Richelieu, an energetic 30-year-old who had fought at La Rochelle. His staff included a force of 78 archers armed with halberds. In January 1585 it was decreed that he was to report to the king every Saturday morning and bring up any breaches of discipline that had occurred during the week. Other men were also employed on similar tasks. The duties of the captains of the king's guard were laid down on 15 September 1574. When Henry attended mass, they were to ensure that everyone present prayed in silence. During his meals, they were to prevent anyone from approaching his table, and after its removal, they were to sort out the people who wished to meet him. Archers posted around the court enforced discipline among the pages and lackeys. François de La Grange-Montigny, who became *capitaine de la Porte* in 1578, kept the key to the king's residence. Armed with a pike, he had to stand guard each day and bar the way to potential trouble-makers.

In addition to tightening up security, Henry III initiated a major reform of the personnel of his chamber that reflected an important change in his attitude towards the nobility. He aimed to draw them into a closer personal relationship or *fidélité* to himself by dismantling the groups that surrounded the dukes of Anjou and Guise. He did not, however, dismiss the holders of court offices that were purely honorary. Thus, the duc de Guise remained *Grand Maître* and the duc de Mayenne *Grand chambellan*. The office of *Premier gentilhomme* continued to be shared by Retz and Villequier. But Henry was determined to end the dynasties of court officials formed by Catherine de' Medici. Between 1578 and 1580 the number of *chambellans* rose from four to 13. Five newcomers had served Henry in Poland. Robert de Combault, who became *Premier maître*

¹³ Chatenet, *La Cour de France*, pp. 112–16.

d'hôtel in January 1577 was one of Henry's oldest servants having served in his ducal household as well as in Poland. As *Premier maître* he was, effectively the *Grand maître*. In addition to controlling the household's administration and finances, he had to see that the staff worked efficiently. He had to be with the king at his *lever*, when he drank his broth and at his meals.

While key posts in the king's household were monopolized as from 1578 by trustworthy men who had shared Henry's Polish experience, the number of *Gentilshommes de la chambre* which had been fixed at 12 per quarter under Charles IX rose to 128 following Henry's accession, 274 in 1580 before settling around 300 in 1582. Altogether about 1,000 noblemen occupied positions at court between 1575 and 1586. They did not all fill new posts; some were replacements following resignations in the late 1570s. By bringing more noblemen into his chamber, Henry aimed to increase their dependence on himself and to remove them from patronage of great nobles. Later in the reign, as we shall see, he had to backtrack. Patronage passed into the hands of the *archimignons*, Joyeuse and Epernon, as the crown needed also to save money.

Unlike Charles IX, Henry III shared his mother's views on court ceremonial. On 10 September 1574, only four days after his arrival in Lyons, he ordered the Grand Master to draw up a set of rules, his aim being 'to restore the order and police in his household as it was in the time of the late kings Francis I and Henry II, his forebear and father ... having nothing closer to his heart or more recommended by the queen his mother than to restore the kingdom to its ancient form of dignity and splendour'. This ambition, however, was not universally shared. Courtiers were shocked by Henry's initial reforms. He refused to admit courtiers to his chamber in the morning before he was dressed, and instead of holding his privy council (*conseil des affaires*) he shut himself up with his mother and chancellor. When he dined he insisted on being served by gentlemen of his chamber who were to be hatless. No one was to speak to him and he ordered a barrier to be set up around his table to keep onlookers at bay. Some noblemen were so upset by these innovations that they left the court. People made fun of the 'small novelties' Henry was thought to have brought back from Poland to mark him off from the human race. French nobles were used to seeing the king as he was being dressed, washing himself or even sitting on his close stool. They were consequently upset when Henry tried to keep them at a distance. They regarded familiarity with the king as their right. Such was their outcry that Henry was soon obliged to backtrack: great nobles were re-admitted to his *lever*, the barrier around his table was removed and the king agreed to hold audience after his dinner.



Figure 11.2 Henry III behind his barrier. Engraving from *Vie et faits notables de Henry de Valois*. Disliking crowds, Henry tried to gain more privacy by having a barrier erected around his table at meal times; this proved so unpopular with courtiers that it had to be removed only to be restored later.

Source: Photo RJK.

Rules laid down by Henry in September 1574 were not written down till August 1578 ‘on account of the troubles which have agitated the kingdom almost continually since his return.’ Even now they were described as provisional. As before, there was to be no public *lever*: the king was to be seen only once he had dressed. The *conseil des affaires* was to meet each morning, and the king was only to attend the *conseil d’état* once a week. After *les affaires*, he attended mass in public as tradition demanded. He then dined in public without any barrier and was served by the household staff. Pages had to be hatless and archers surrounding the king’s table were to prevent courtiers from approaching him or speaking to him. These rules were new: never before had the king’s daily routine been written down with such clocklike precision, nor had attendance at his lever been divided into a number of phases.

The Order of the Holy Spirit

In November 1578 Henry III founded the Order of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ He was moved by certain coincidences in his life. The fact that he was born, elected king of Poland and succeeded to the French throne on the feast of Pentecost seemed to augur a high and sacred destiny. During his stay in Venice, Henry had been given the statutes of the Order of the Holy Spirit that had been founded in Naples in 1352 by Louis of Taranto who had been crowned King of Jerusalem and Sicily on the feast of Pentecost. The order founded by Henry bore the same name but had a more chivalric character. It was inaugurated with a religious procession of great splendour. A large painting depicting the occasion was placed in the church of the Grands Augustins.

The Order of the Holy Spirit was a kind of militia aimed at establishing new ties of allegiance and fidelity between the king and an aristocratic élite. It stood in sharp contrast to the Order of St. Michael which had become devalued under Charles IX by too many nominations. Henry sharply reduced the size of the new order, his aim being to replace the old system of aristocratic patronage by one centred on himself. In the words of L'Estoile: 'It was said that the king had recently founded this order so as to link more narrowly to himself those persons he wished to appoint.'¹⁵ The role of this élite was defined in clause 90 of the order's statutes: the knights were to dedicate themselves not only to 'the defence of our faith and religion and of our person and estate', but also 'to set an example of a pacific and exemplary life-style'. Henry wrote to each knight saying that he was to serve as 'a mirror and example to all of my other subjects'. Observers believed that the personal tie between him and the knights was intended to short-circuit the influence of the great nobles. This was emphasized by the installation ceremony: Henry gave each new knight his cloak and collar in exchange for his oath. As though to stress the bond between them, it became the custom for each knight to receive a gift (not a pension) from the king of 1,000 *écus*. Although the number of knights was originally fixed at 100, a total of 108 were appointed by Henry. As from 1585 promotions to the order were essentially replacements of deceased knights.

¹⁴ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III roi shakespeareien* (Paris, 1985), pp. 495–501; Jacqueline Boucher, *La cour de Henri III* (Rennes, 1986), p. 194.

¹⁵ *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 3, p. 12.



Figure 11.3 Henry III presiding over the first chapter of the Order of the Holy Spirit (w/c on paper) French school (sixteenth century) Musée Condé, Chantilly.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

The knights of the Holy Spirit, unlike those of the order of St. Michael, were not purely honorary; they had to serve the king like other domestic officials. They were summoned to his chamber at 7 a.m. each morning, and at 2 p.m. two had to stand beside the king as he dined. This service was meant to replace that of the *gentilshommes ordinaires de la chambre* who had become too numerous. One-quarter of the 108 knights appointed by Henry had formed part of his original entourage. Twenty-three had accompanied him to Poland. They represented 60 per cent of the gentlemen and chamberlains who made up his household at the time. Sixty-three per cent of the knights in 1578 occupied major domestic or military positions. As from December 1583 the pool from which they were drawn widened to include ordinary noblemen. By 1585 the institution had become essentially the king's *clientèle*.¹⁶

In 1585 Henry III drew up another set of rules for the court. He did so in his own hand, according to Giovanni Dolfin, the Venetian ambassador. He showed them to his mother on New Year's eve and asked for her frank opinion of them. The printed version of his text was distributed to courtiers on 1 January 1585. Unlike the regulations of 1578, the new rules revolutionized the day-to-day life of the court. To begin with, the royal apartment was transformed: a suite of four rooms – the *salle*, the antechamber, the state chamber (*chambre d'état*) and the audience chamber (*chambre d'audience*) – now led to the king's chamber. The use of these rooms involved a sequence of entries comparable to a 'prodigious ballet'. Only Joyeuse and Épernon and the king's valets were allowed to approach him in his *cabinet* as he dressed. No one was to enter his chamber and courtiers were distributed according to their rank in the four rooms leading up to it. Then, as a signal was given that the king was awake, each group of courtiers was allowed to move forward one room. The greatest lords entered the chamber, but only privy councillors (*ceux des Affaires*) were allowed into the *cabinet*. As the king asked for his morning broth (*collation*), councillors, royal *officiers*, the first physician and others entered his chamber. A final movement in the antechambers took place when the king asked for his cloak and sword and entered his chamber on his way to mass. The new rule-book did not change the ritual surrounding the king's dinner except for the re-introduction of a barrier around his table.

It is likely that Henry drew inspiration for the transformation of his apartment by the court of Philip II of Spain for Frenchmen at the time were much impressed by its ceremonial. They adopted some of its manners, notably

¹⁶ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, p. 200–204.

the kissing of hands.¹⁷ Henry III aimed to turn his court into a shrine dedicated to his majesty. In 1585 he created the office of Master of ceremonies of France for Guillaume Pot, *sieur de Rhodes*. Each morning, Pot had to reach the chapel before the king in order to oversee the placing of courtiers at high mass and, later, at vespers. He had to do likewise at marriages, baptisms, banquets and diplomatic receptions. Pot controlled precedence by keeping a list of all the nobles present at court as well as a register of ceremonies past and present.

An Englishman at Henry III's Court

We owe the best account of life at the French court in the 1580s to an Englishman, Richard Cook, who accompanied Sir Henry Cobham, the English resident ambassador in France. It was written between November 1583 and September 1584 and given to the Earl of Derby when he visited Paris in February 1585. Cook describes a typical day in Henry III's life as follows:

When the king is ready to rise, which is ordinarily between six and seven, he calleth unto one that lieth near unto him to give him his night gown and a pair of little buskins lined with soft and very fine leather, and when he retireth himself in another chamber where divers valets do attend to make him ready, and being there set down before the fire, one of these valets of his chamber bringeth him his doublet, another gartereth his hose, the third, whilst he is thus making himself ready, kenneth and trimmeth his head and the fourth plucketh on his shoes. When these valets have all done, the king riseth out of his chair and, standing by the fire, one of the gentlemen of his chamber bringeth and presenteth unto him a certain bouillon or broth the which he receiveth in his hand and suppeth it up without any spoon. After this he sheweth himself ready to speak with all men that be in his chamber. But before any other do enter, and during the time that he is making himself ready, the three secretaries ordinarily first come in and such other only as be of the Council of the cabinet, there every secretary according to his several department do read and report unto his majesty all such news as be sent to the court. For the greatest number of letters which be sent to the king be first delivered unto the secretaries who do afterwards present and read the same to the king in his cabinet.

¹⁷ Monique Chatenet, 'Henri III et l'ordre de la cour: évolution de l'étiquette à travers les règlements généraux de 1578 et de 1585' in *Henri III et son temps*, ed. Robert Sauzet (Paris, 1992), pp. 133–9.

When the secretaries have done, the usher is commanded to open the door of the presence, and while the nobility do enter and then attend, his Majesty after he hath heard a little short mass in his cabinet and after the said mass broken his fast, as they term it there '*en bon escient*', he cometh out into the presence, and, having there devised awhile among his noblemen and with those of his council, he goeth publicly to the chapel of Bourbon accompanied with the queen and with the queen his mother and with many other princes and nobility to his high mass. So soon as he is descended down into the castle yard, he is there received by his guard of Swiss to the number of three score, who march before him three and three, everyone carrying a halberd on his shoulder, and two of these Swiss sound upon the taber and the fife the stroke of marching in battle after the manner of their own country, not ceasing till the king be entered into the chapel, then as well as these Swiss as all the rest of the king's guard making a lane between the castle gate and the chapel where the king is entered to stand and attend his return. The king being at his high mass, the greatest prince which is there present giveth a French crown for his offering and the greatest prelate presenteth unto him the pix.

After this high mass the King goeth presently from the chapel to dinner, which is ordinarily at ten o'clock, and the place where he dineth is always for the most in his chamber, where the chieftest prince presenteth him a napkin very finely and thick platted, being first wet at one end, and with the same he washeth his hands and wipeth them at the other end. But this office is always executed by the young queen, his wife, when she dineth with him. The king being set at his table, and whilst he is at dinner it is permitted and lawful for all men to enter into the antechamber to see him dine and to hear him talk and devise among his nobility. Also during the time that he dineth he giveth liberally audience to all that he desirous to move him of anything secretly in his ear unto whom he answereth *submissa voce*. The King sitteth every week thrice at supper at a round table among his queens and greatest ladies of the court.

After his Majesty hath dined, he retireth himself into the presence and sometimes into his cabinet for two or three hours where he heareth his secretaries and delivereth to every of them their commissions to make their dispatches to all parts, and after he hath spent some time in this fashion he cometh again into the presence and from thence goeth accompanied with his princes and noblemen to the Queen Mother's chamber, where also the young queen meeteth him. And if it be needful by reason of any urgent affairs to hold council that afternoon then they go both together unto the council chamber, otherwise they abide still there devising amongst their nobility till evensong. And this order they commonly keep on Sundays and holy days for on other days the King is accustomed to play after dinner at a certain Italian game called commonly *Palle Maille* or tennis amongst

his noblemen, or at premiere with the Queen Mother at the Tuileries or some other garden where oftentimes they sup together.

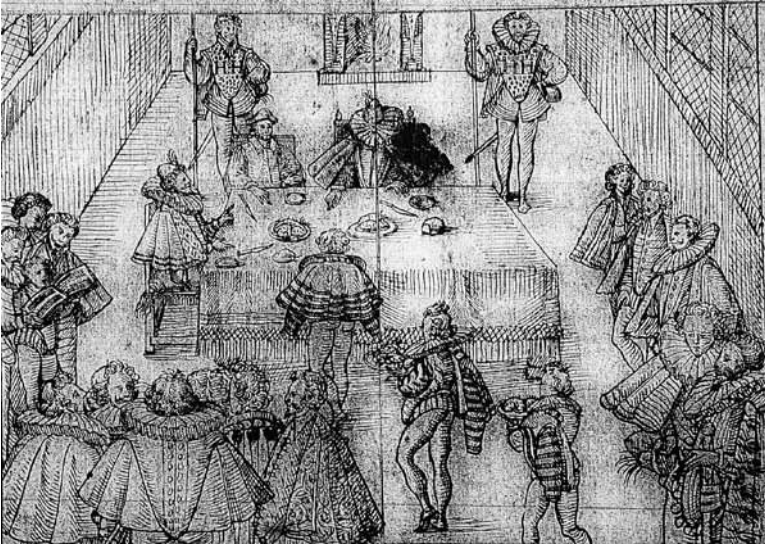


Figure 11.4 Henry III dining ‘en public’. Drawing in Richard Cook’s account of his stay in France in 1584. ‘La premiere partie du compte de Richarde Cooke de Kent pour son voiage et temps employé en France’. Henry III at table, foldout between f.62 and f.62b [V.a.146]. The king is seated, his back to the fire, flanked by two halbardiers. Sharing his table are an ecclesiastic and a nobleman, possibly one of the *archimignons*. A procession of servants is bringing food to the table as choristers sing and courtiers, wearing huge ruffs, stand and talk.

Source: By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.

When the Court is united altogether in any great town or in any place commodious to receive the whole train the King is accustomed to banquet twice every week with all the great princes and ladies of the court, and that is commonly on Thursdays and Sundays at night, at what time he himself doth openly sup at a round table with the queens and other ladies in the antechamber where it is lawful for all men to enter and to see them at supper. After supper, having awhile devised together, his Majesty goeth to revells into the great hall, where he himself danceth

among the ladies and so passeth away the time for two or three hours ... then the King leaveth and sitteth down between his queen and the queen mother giving the looking on to his young princes and ladies and after retireth himself into his cabinet having first given the goodnight to the queens and all the company.¹⁸

¹⁸ David Potter and P.R. Roberts, 'An Englishman's View of the Court of Henri III, 1584–85: Richard Cook's "Description of the Court of France"' in *French History*, 2 (1988), pp. 312–44. I have modernized the spelling and introduced some punctuation.

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Chapter 12

The *Archimignons*

It was in 1580 that two of Henry's *mignons* suddenly rose to prominence. They were Anne de Joyeuse, baron d'Arques, and Jean-Louis de La Valette. Their careers ran more or less along parallel lines. Both studied at the Collège de Navarre in Paris before taking up military careers. In 1577 Arques served under Anjou at the siege of Issouire before joining the court where he was soon noticed by Henry III. Early in 1579 he was given command of a *compagnie d'ordonnance* and appointed governor of Mont-Saint-Michel. He carried messages to and from Catherine de' Medici during her peace mission to the Midi and Dauphiné. He also took part in the siege of La Fère where he was badly wounded in the face. Jean-Louis de La Valette and his brother, Bernard, spent their childhood at Caumont, the family seat in Gascony. Their father, Jean, was a soldier and a member of the *noblesse seconde*. In 1567 Jean-Louis and his brother entered the Collège de Navarre, but soon took up military careers. Jean-Louis fought at the siege of La Rochelle where he was introduced to the future Henry III by the duc de Guise. Though a Catholic, he entered the service of the king of Navarre only to leave him when the latter reverted to his Protestant faith. La Valette then returned to Paris. Unlike many other *mignons*, he had not been to Poland with Henry. He seems to have gained his notice by calling on several prominent noblemen as he travelled from Gascony to Paris and collecting from them information about their respective provinces which he passed on to the king and his mother following his arrival in Paris. But La Valette's biographer gives another account of how he won the king's favour. On the eve of the siege of La Charité, Henry gave him 1,200 *écus* with which to buy arms and horses. But La Valette also purchased a magnificent tent which he erected under the windows of the queen's residence at Romorantin where Anjou's army had camped. One day, as the king and his mother stood at an open window, they spotted the tent and, impressed by its magnificence, asked who might be its owner. On learning that it was La Valette, they praised his '*galanterie*'. True or false, the story throws

light on how royal favour might be captured by a would-be *mignon*. La Valette himself liked to tell the story 60 years later.¹



Figure 12.1 Portrait of Jean Louis de la Valette (1554–1642), duc d'Épernon (oil on canvas) French school (sixteenth century) Château of Beauregard, France.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

It was in 1578 after the siege of Issoire that La Valette became one of Henry's *mignons* along with François d'O, Arques and Saint-Luc. They were part of a *clientèle* which the king was seeking to build up on a par with those of Anjou and Guise. In August 1581 Arques became duc de Joyeuse after his *vicomté* had been raised to the status of a *duché-pairie*. No less than 55 fiefs were similarly promoted during Henry's reign, his purpose being to compensate knights of St. Michael

¹ Arlette Jouanna, 'Faveur et favoris: L'Exemple des mignons de Henri III' in *Henri III et son temps*, ed. Robert Sauzet (Paris, 1992), pp. 158–9.

whose order had become devalued under Charles IX. Joyeuse's elevation was one of the great events of 1581. It was a reward for the loyal service he had given to Henry to which his facial scar bore witness. As an additional reward, he was accorded precedence over all other dukes and peers except princes of the blood or foreign princes. La Valette was created duc d'Épernon one month later after he had bought the barony of Épernon from the king of Navarre. As the royal letters setting up the duchy explained, the honour was intended to encourage others to seek 'the true nourishment of virtue' by loyally serving the king. Épernon, too, was given precedence over other dukes and peers so as to place him on the same footing as Joyeuse.²



Figure 12.2 Portrait of Anne de Batarnay, baron d'Arques, then duc de Joyeuse 1561–87) (oil on canvas) French school (seventeenth century) Château de Beauregard, France.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

² Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seyssel, 2000), pp. 466–9.

As from 1 January 1582 Joyeuse and Épernon were given the title of *Premier gentilhomme de la chambre*. Retz, who had shared the title with Villequier, had surrendered it the previous year so that Henry might give it to Joyeuse. Villequier, on the other hand, kept his until 1589. So the office was shared by three men, each serving in theory for four months. The appointment of Joyeuse and Épernon consecrated their monopoly of access to the sovereign. They alone were allowed direct access to his person without having to wait in an antechamber, a privilege denied to Villequier. They also shared the privilege of eating at the far-end (*bas-bout*) of the king's table. A court regulation of 1 January 1585 created a distinction between the *gentilshommes ordinaires de la chambre* and the two dukes. This already existed, for, as early as 8 December 1584 the English ambassador noted that Henry III allowed only Joyeuse and Épernon to enter his private apartments while other courtiers were distributed among three antechambers leading to his *cabinet*. Joyeuse and Épernon could enter the room whenever they liked, even if the king were absent. They alone could follow Henry to his *coucher* or be admitted when he was dressing. Courtiers waiting outside were only admitted when he was ready.³

Contemporaries viewed the two *archimignons* quite differently. While Joyeuse was praised for his liberality, Épernon was criticized for his rapacity. Legend has it that Joyeuse once gave the secretaries of state a royal gift of 100,000 *écus* as compensation for keeping them waiting till midnight in an antechamber. According to his secretary, the duke was particularly generous in passing on royal gifts to others. Épernon was the exact opposite. But according to his secretary, the duke's meanness benefited the king's subjects by reducing pressure on them to help maintain the king's magnificence. Épernon's table and stables, he claimed, were the largest at court, his houses the finest and his suite of servants the most numerous. As for Joyeuse, he claimed in December 1585 that his fortune was such that it would not suffer if the king were to die. Both *archimignons* owed their wealth essentially to the crown whereas powerful lords at the start of the religious wars had drawn on their own family fortunes.⁴ But they were not left in sole charge of their wealth: managed by royal officials, it was intended to strengthen the king's authority in various ways. Money which they received was redistributed to their clients, thereby indirectly enlarging the king's *clientèle*. The *archimignons* also assisted him financially. In 1586, for example, Joyeuse lent Henry 114,000 *livres* for a military campaign and Épernon paid

³ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 469–71.

⁴ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 471–3.

him 900,000 *livres* for a county in Brittany to help pay for the war. The office of *Premier gentilhomme de la chambre* is said to have cost Épernon 25,000 *écus*.

Henry III called d'O, Joyeuse and Épernon 'my children' and once said that, like any good parent, he needed to marry them off.⁵ The first to be so honoured was Joyeuse who married Marguerite de Lorraine, the queen's sister-in-law. Henry gave them the enormous sum of 400,000 *écus*. The betrothal ceremony took place at the Louvre on 18 September 1581 and the wedding itself at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois on the 24 September. The king, who gave away the bride, wore the same costume as the groom. Covered with embroidery, pearls and precious stones, it was valued at 10,000 *écus*. The wedding was followed by a lavish series of festivities which became known as the 'Magnificences of the duc de Joyeuse'.⁶ Henry had planned them since July. Described by L'Estoile as 'mummings, finery, dances, music, masks, tournaments and similar follies and superfluities', they allegedly cost 3,600,000 *livres* and were still not fully paid for 15 years later.⁷ Writing to Joyeuse's grandmother, Henry said: 'If I could have made him my son I would have done so, but I am making him my brother ... I love him so much that I cannot love myself more.' He henceforth referred to Joyeuse as 'my brother-in-law'.

In 1581 Henry decided to marry Épernon to one of the queen's sisters, like Joyeuse. But Christine, the queen's younger sister, was only eight years old, and Épernon was unwilling to wait for her to be marriageable. On 23 August 1587 he married Marguerite de Foix-Candale at Vincennes almost in secret: Henry attended alone without the queen or queen-mother. But a great feast was held on the 30 August at the Hôtel de Montmorency in the rue Sainte-Avoie in the presence of the king and both queens. Henry gave the bride a pearl necklace valued at 100,000 *écus*. She was the niece of Henri de Montmorency-Damville, governor of Languedoc and her marriage may be seen as part of a strategy to strengthen Épernon's position in the south-west and to reinforce his role as intermediary between the king and the party of Montmorency-Damville.⁸

By arranging several marriages linking the families of Joyeuse and La Valette, Henry aimed to create a large family united by royal favour.⁹ In November 1581 Joyeuse's brother, Henri, comte de Bouchage, married Épernon's younger sister, Catherine, and in February 1582 Épernon's brother, Bernard, married Anne de

⁵ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 479–504.

⁶ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 486–92.

⁷ *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 3, pp. 154–8.

⁸ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 481–2.

⁹ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 482–4.

Batarnay, Joyeuse's aunt. The purpose of these marriages was to build around the king a solid network of *fidélités*. Not everyone, however, appreciated this strategy. François d'O ceased to be a *mignon* around the time of the Joyeuse marriage. According to Pasquier, he was dismissed without warning on the day of the Joyeuse wedding which had 'broken his heart', but it was on 4 October that he was dismissed after Henry had summoned him to his *cabinet* and accused him of being an incorrigible gambler and of neglecting his duties.¹⁰ D'O appealed to Catherine de' Medici who tried to get the king to change his mind, but Henry stood firm. He accused d'O of trying to sow discord between Joyeuse and La Valette. Lucinge blamed the latter for d'O's fall for it was known that La Valette had insulted d'O in May. D'O may also have tried to draw closer to the duc d'Anjou as Saint-Luc had done earlier. This would have angered Henry who strongly disapproved of anyone joining his brother's party. Significantly, the first person to enter the king's study after d'O's dismissal was La Valette.¹¹

By bringing the *archimignons* into his family Henry hoped to silence those who complained of their sudden rise to eminence. He was especially fond of Joyeuse who exemplified the kind of nobility he wished to have around. Unlike Épernon, he had strong cultural interests. In 1583 he took under his protection a troop of Italian actors led by Fabritio de Fornaris who dedicated his play *Angelica* to him. In 1585, Pierre de Dampmartin dedicated a treatise to Joyeuse, holding him up as a cultural example to the rest of the nobility. He was also, like Henry, an accomplished dancer.

The 'Magnificences of the Duc de Joyeuse'

In spite of all France's troubles during the last decades of the sixteenth century, the court managed to enjoy itself. It staged banquets, balls and *mascarades* that offered the king and his courtiers ample scope for sartorial and choreographic display. In 1580 Sir Henry Cobham noted that Henry III devoted more time to ballet than to war. Ever since his childhood, when he had been taught by Italian dancing masters, he loved to dance. He ordered ballets to be held at his court on Mondays and Thursdays. The expense was to be borne by the courtiers themselves who were expected to turn up with the appropriate dancing gear. Even in the privacy of Ollainville, Henry invited local ladies to dance with him

¹⁰ Estienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, ed. D. Thickett (Geneva, 1966), p. 412.

¹¹ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, p. 433–6.

regardless of their social background; he also danced at his courtiers' wedding celebrations, often in their own Parisian residences. During Carnival, he danced all night three times a week with Parisian ladies. 'In truth,' wrote an English observer in 1584, 'there has been nothing but dancing, banqueting, from one house and company to another, bravery in apparel glittering like the Sun.' Henry organized a spectacular ballet at the Louvre for the English embassy that came to Paris in February 1585 to give him the Order of the Garter. One hundred and twenty dancers and musicians took part. After entering the *grande salle*, they danced across it twice ensuring that their steps exactly matched the rhythm of the music. The climax was a ballet in which 24 couples traced on the floor the letters of the names of the king and queen. According to the Tuscan, Busini, the entertainment cost the enormous sum of 30,000 crowns.¹²

Cook's description of Henry III's court contains the following account of a ball at the court that consisted of a series of six dances: *pavane*, *allemande*, *branle*, *courante*, *volta* and galliard:

In the first ball or dance the tabers and fifes do sound a pavane where the King leadeth the young queen by the hand and danceth with her being followed with a number of his greatest princes and princesses and other ladies of the court. In the second dance the said tabers and fifes do sound an *Allemande*. And in these two dances it is never seen that any particular nobleman or knight, lest he be one of the king's mignons, do invite or offer himself to dance with any princes of the blood, but always where there wanteth any princes to dance with them one of them leadeth the other. And when it happeneth that the king danceth with some other than his queen, as he doth ordinarily when there is any great marriage in the court, and also on Twelfth Night at what time he danceth with his Queen of the Bean, it is not lawful for any to invite the queen his wife but by express commandment from his Majesty and otherwise it is never seen that any dare presume to dance with her unless it be the duc de Mercoeur, the queen's own brother. In the third dance the violins sound the *branles* in the which it is danced round in form of a ring there can be no great order observed in it. Only this may be marked in those *branles* that if the Queen dance not between two princes at the least he must be a prince that taketh her by one hand. In the fourth dance the violins sound the *correntes* where commonly the queen giveth over but the king continueth and danceth with the ladies and maids of honour at his pleasure. In the fifth dance the violins sound the *Volta* in the which the king taketh his greatest

¹² Margaret McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 81.

pleasure, will always dance the same with the Queen Mother's maids of honour. In the end and sixth dance the cornets together with the violins sound a galliard, but then the King leaveth and sitteth down between the queen and the queen mother giving the looking on to his young princes and ladies, and after retireth himself into his cabinet having first given the goodnight to the queens and all the company.¹³

It was in the autumn of 1581 that the most lavish entertainments were laid on at Henry III's court to celebrate the recent wedding of the *archimignon*, Anne de Joyeuse. They lasted a fortnight and included tournaments, an aquatic *fête*, an equestrian ballet and a fireworks display. Temporary buildings designed by the best artists of the day were erected in the streets and squares of the capital, and the various shows were accompanied by music described as 'the most harmonious that had ever been heard'. The first entertainment took place in the *salle* of the Hôtel de Bourbon, behind the Louvre, on the evening of 19 September. It took the form of a combat in which the dukes of Guise, Mercœur and Montmorency defended Cupid, chained to a rock, against a team led by the king. On the 24 September a ball took place in the upper hall of the Louvre after a dinner and supper. On the day after the wedding, Joyeuse offered a banquet and a ball at the Hôtel de Guise.¹⁴ A small painting on copper, now in the Louvre, shows Henry III and his entourage in the upper hall of the Louvre. Joyeuse and his wife are in the centre, about to dance. She wears a long white dress, he a small black hat, a green doublet, breeches of the same colour, a short grey cape and stockings that cling to his thighs.

The most famous of the 'Magnificences' was the *Balet comique de la royne* on 15 October which lasted five hours. It was prepared by Balthasar de Beaujoyeux, one of the queen's *valets de chambre*, and written by Nicholas Filleul de La Chesnaye. Both were strongly influenced by the pastoral: hence their choice of symbolic places (grotto, grove) and mythological beings (Pan, nymphs, naiads, tritons, Circe). The spectacle expressed the conflict between the forces of Harmony and Reason, on the one hand, and of the passions, on the other. The solar metaphor was used to characterize the king's superiority over his subjects. Charles IX had already appeared dressed as the Sun in the carnival

¹³ D. Potter and P.R. Roberts, 'An Englishman's view of the court of Henri III, 1584–1585: Richard Cook's description of the Court of France' in *French History*, 2 (1988), p. 341. I have modernized the spelling.

¹⁴ Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1975), pp. 149–72.



Figure 12.3 Ball at the court of Henry III on the occasion of the marriage of Anne duc de Joyeuse to Marguerite de Vaudémont, 14 September 1581 (oil on panel) French school sixteenth century. The Louvre, Paris.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

of 1571; Henry III adopted the same imagery, only more grandly. He entered the courtyard of the Louvre in a chariot dressed as the Sun god surrounded by planets and stars. The music composed for the *Balet comique de la royne* was aimed at producing 'effects', while the plot evoked cosmic forces in aid of the French monarchy. The theme was the transfer of power from the enchantress Circe to the royal family. At one end of the hall was the garden of Circe before whom passed men she had turned into beasts; at the other was the 'golden vault', representing the celestial world in which singers and instrumentalists were divided into 10 *concerts de musique*. The action began when a nobleman escaped from Circe's garden, crossed the hall, and fell at the king's feet, imploring him to rid the world of the sorceress. A mythological drama followed in which Circe, surrounded by sirens and satyrs, was defeated by the four cardinal Virtues and Minerva. When the Virtues appeared in star-spangled robes, they called on the gods to descend from Heaven. As the musicians in the 'golden vault' replied to their music, the celestial forces began to gain the upper hand. Circe's defeat



Figure 12.4 *The Balet comique de la royne* in the Salle Bourbon on 15 October 1581. Engraving by R. de Beaujoyeux, 1582. In the foreground sits Henry III flanked by his mother and a nobleman. The god, Pan, sits in a wood on the right, and opposite, concealed by clouds, is a 'golden vault' containing singers and players. Circe, the enchantress, sits in an artificial garden at the far end. In the centre, a gentleman calls on the king to free the world from her baneful rule.

Source: Photo RJK.

was signalled by a loud clap of thunder and the appearance of Jupiter seated on an eagle. His descent was accompanied by 'the most learned and excellent music that had even been seen or heard'. Once Circe had surrendered, she was taken before the king as a prisoner. The performers then knelt before him in acknowledgement of the power of his wisdom as guided by his mother's advice. The festivities continued with a ballet celebrating the establishment of harmony in which dancers passed in front of Henry 15 times and formed a great chain with four interlacings. Finally, medals bearing engraved images of animals were distributed to the principal spectators. The queen offered one with a dolphin to Henry as a presage of the hoped-for birth of a son.¹⁵

The Penitent King

Following the Peace of Fleix in November 1580, Henry III sought to restore harmony to his kingdom by reforming his own spiritual life. He seems to have identified his own body with the body politic and believed that its purification would bring about the moral reformation of his subjects. Like St. Louis, he embraced asceticism under the influence of the orders of Minimes and Capuchins, whom he had taken under his special protection in July 1576, and of the *Feuillants*, or reformed Cistercians, founded by Jean de La Barrière in 1577. Henry also found encouragement in the works of Spanish mystics, like Louis of Aragon. From the start of his reign, he had shown a liking for spectacular demonstrations of piety. The procession of White Penitents in which he had taken part at Avignon in December 1574 had impressed him greatly. In March 1575 during Lent he listened to sermons and attended masses in various Parisian churches. On 9 October, the feast of St. Denis, Henry took part in a solemn procession in which the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle were carried.¹⁶

Henry was desperately anxious about the future of his dynasty for his queen had so far failed to give him a son. He feared that this might be a divine punishment. So he set about propitiating God by acts of contrition, including pilgrimages. On 11 August 1582 Henry set off from Paris, accompanied by Jesuits and by the dukes of Joyeuse and Épernon, on a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame du Puy

¹⁵ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 486–92; Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1988), pp. 236–74; Yates, *Astraea*; McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance*, pp. 114–18.

¹⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 1, p. 204.

in order to obtain the Virgin's intercession.¹⁷ He looked for a spiritual counsellor who might help him overcome certain inner torments. He turned first to Claude Mathieu, the provincial of the French Jesuits, but soon rejected him as too close to the Guises. His place was taken by Father Edmond Auger, another Jesuit, who aimed to revive Catholic militancy by creating confraternities of ecclesiastical and lay penitents. He had founded an order of penitents in Toulouse, Lyons and Dole, and it was with his help that on 20 March 1583 Henry founded a similar body in Paris, called the Congregation of White Penitents of Our Lady's Annunciation.¹⁸ A set of statutes were drawn up which Henry asked Auger to read aloud to members of the court. He explained the spiritual aims of the royal foundation and on 20 March the nuncio celebrated mass in front of persons wishing to join it. They signed a profession of faith. The aims proclaimed by Henry were the spiritual enhancement of the brethren and collective prayers aimed at persuading God to assist the king in governing the kingdom and to protect it and the royal family. Four days later, on the feast of the Annunciation, Henry and his *mignons* went in procession through Paris from the church of the Grands Augustins to the cathedral of Notre-Dame. They walked bare-foot, each wearing a long tunic of white holland cloth with a knotted girdle and a pointed hood with two holes for the eyes. Undeterred by heavy rain, they sang psalms and litanies before falling on their knees in the cathedral and intoning the *Salve Regina*.¹⁹ On Maunday Thursday, the king and his courtiers repeated their penitential procession, this time at night and carrying torches which revealed backs bloodied by self-flagellation.²⁰ This event prompted a flood of lampoons that fastened on the unnatural practices popularly attributed to the king and his *mignons*. Henry's sincerity inevitably came under suspicion as his penitential mania contrasted so bizarrely with the court's foppery and extravagance.²¹ Henry was deeply upset when members of his new order were called *battus* or *flagellants*. This was because they carried a whip hanging from their belt. On 27 March the king ordered Maurice Poncet, the *curé* of Saint-Pierre-des-Arcis, who had denounced the new confraternity as made up of 'hypocrites and atheists', to be imprisoned. Poncet had also accused the so-called penitents of consuming fat capons and other succulent meats after their procession. Two

¹⁷ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 29–30.

¹⁸ Jaqueline Boucher, *Société et mentalités autour de Henri III* (Paris, 2007), pp. 1037–42; Isabelle Haquet, *L'Énigme de Henri III. Ce que nous révèlent les images* (Nanterre, 2011), pp. 249–63.

¹⁹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 76–7.

²⁰ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 79.

²¹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 80–87.

days later, 80 pages and lackeys at the Louvre were flogged for staging a mock procession in which they had covered their faces with handkerchiefs pierced by two holes for the eyes.²² Henry tried to counter public hostility by sponsoring the publication of works justifying his foundation. Auger in his *Metanoelogie* argued that kingship and priesthood were inseparable.²³

Parisians eventually came to accept the new Catholic militancy. In 1584 the young cardinal de Joyeuse founded a company of Blue penitents with around 80 members. Under the inspiration of St. Jerome their rule was stricter than that of the White penitents. In 1585 Pierre de Gondy, cardinal-bishop of Paris, founded a company of Black penitents and this was soon followed by another of Grey penitents. Each confraternity had its own chapel in a Parisian church. Courtiers were mainly to be found among the White penitents. Henry paid for ornaments in their chapel in the church of the Grands Augustins and also for their habit. The total cost amounted to 4,454 *écus* in December 1583. When he set up the White penitents Henry expressed the wish that all French towns should follow his example and many did so.

In December 1583 Henry set up at Vincennes a confraternity of Hieronymites consisting at first of 12 members; others were added later.²⁴ As in the case of the White Penitents, he himself was a member and took part in all its activities. The Hieronymites comprised courtiers and ecclesiastics. Very small and simply furnished cells were built for them in the Bois de Vincennes where they made retreats from time to time wearing friars' habits and living in accordance with a strict rule. One of them, Henri de Joyeuse, comte de Bouchage, became a Capuchin monk following the death of his young wife, Catherine d'Épernon, sister of the *archimignon*. In 1584 Henry III decided to set up a small group to pray and meditate with him during his retreats. Hitherto he had retired alone to some religious house, but now he thought of having a site set aside for the purpose where services would be provided by strict religious orders. He chose the forest of Vincennes as the site of a hermitage and acquired an old priory from the order of Grandmont which was transformed into a collection of closely guarded and enclosed buildings. The church was dedicated to Mary Magdalene and the new foundation was called the Oratory of Our Lady of Vie Saine (healthy life). Puns of this kind were popular at his court. Services at the oratory were conducted at first by Cordeliers who were later replaced by Minimes. Members included

²² L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 4, p. 78.

²³ Boucher, *Société et Mentalités*, p. 1039.

²⁴ Boucher, *Société et Mentalités*, pp. 1042–4; Haquet, *L'Énigme de Henri III*, pp. 262–85.

all the Hieronymites including Épernon and Joyeuse, a sprinkling of Guises, a solid phalanx of bishops and other clergy, and also some literary and musical persons. The statutes laid down that two brethren had to be musicians. Several members of the Palace Academy were brethren, including Miron, the king's doctor, Desportes the poet and Du Perron. In the words of Frances Yates: 'One has to picture this great royal park, containing some of the finest trees in France, in the long glades of which the deer wandered, full of religious life inspired by a Counter Reformation saint and planned in the fantastic brain of Henri III'.²⁵ Sacred oratory formed an important part of life at Vincennes. In October 1585 the king himself delivered a sermon on the feast of St. Jerome, patron saint of the Hieronymites, who was much admired in the Renaissance when many painters liked to portray him musing in his desert cell surrounded by books with a lion at his side. Another preacher at Vincennes was Davy Du Perron who gave theological discourses. In one of these he indicated that Henry wanted the spiritual discourses to be 'academic' in character and that literary persons as well as ecclesiastics should be asked to deliver them. In other words, the Palace Academy was being transposed into a sacred one whose purpose was to be to combat heresy 'with spiritual arms'.²⁶ The focus of worship at Vincennes appears to have been a reliquary containing a fragment of the true cross inserted in a cross of gold. This may have been Borromeo's gift to Henry. If so, it would have symbolized his promotion of Counter-Reformation penitence. The reliquary was flanked by satyrs which some scholars have seen as pagan prefigurations of the central mystery of the Eucharist.

In the spring of 1585 Henry had cause to feel despondent: the kingdom once again stood on the brink of civil war. He sought a mystical escape from his predicament, but this time with less publicity. On 10 May 1585 he formed a new order of 21 courtly penitents known as the Confraternity of The Death and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Wearing a black habit and hood, the members met on Fridays in an oratory at the Louvre.²⁷ They knelt, recited the psalms *Miserere* and *De Profundis*, and beat themselves with a scourge. The confraternity, however, was soon wound up, possibly after the papal nuncio, Ragazzoni, had expressed alarm about its excesses. Miron, the king's physician, and Combaut, his steward, were also concerned, as was Catherine de' Medici

²⁵ Yates, *The French Academies*, p. 162.

²⁶ Yates, *The French Academies*, p. 163.

²⁷ Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 1046–7.

who thought Henry was neglecting his political duties. He retorted that he did not neglect them as much as Charles IX had done when hunting.²⁸

In September 1585 at a time when the League was pressing the king to fight the Huguenots, he spent much of his time in religious devotion. The Tuscan ambassador reported that he was 'wholly consumed' by it. In addition to undertaking a pilgrimage, mostly on foot, to Notre-Dame de Chartres, he spent several weeks in the Bois de Vincennes with his Hieronymites in prayer, fasting and self-flagellation. He also created a new congregation in honour of the Conception of Our Lady, later changed to Our Lady of Mercy with a membership restricted to 24. A chapel was built for the new company near the Capuchin monastery in Paris and the king spent many hours here singing litanies and the divine office, saying prayers, attending masses, listening to sermons, kissing the earth and sleeping on straw. The Venetian ambassador described his devotions in the new chapel as follows: 'He has spent eight continuous days in that place, dressed for the most part in a habit similar to that of the Capuchins ... spending five hours in singing the divine office, four in doing orations, both vocal and mental, the remainder in saying litanies in procession and in listening to a sermon by that Father Emond, Jesuit ... When the sermon was finished, the lights were extinguished by command of the King, who, being the first one to beat himself harshly, invited the others of the company to follow him with the same fervour. They did this with such spirit that even the Capuchins who were present ... were amazed'.²⁹

While Henry lived like a monk, he neglected affairs of state requiring his urgent attention. Before leaving on the pilgrimage to Chartres, he sent a note to Villeroy: 'I entrust you with all my affairs with which you are concerned ... and see that no one sends me anything unless it is really necessary'.³⁰ In another note, he wrote: 'While I am at the Capuchins, if there are any urgent or important matters from the dispatches, show them to the Queen Mother without sending them to me'.³¹ Catherine was not amused. On 16 December 1585 she went to Vincennes and scolded her son. Such austerities, she said, were bad for his health which needed to be preserved for the sake of the kingdom. Henry promised to take care, but showed his annoyance. He also promised to spend only Christmas

²⁸ Jacqueline Boucher, *La cour de Henri III* (Rennes, 1986), p. 194.

²⁹ A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva, 1973), pp. 150–51; Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, pp. 1044–6.

³⁰ N.M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State in the Age of Catherine de Medici* (London, 1962), p. 251.

³¹ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1943), Vol. 8, p. 178n.

Day in his new chapel, but spent eight days there after leaving an order that no one should disturb him, not even Catherine. She was relieved when Henry stopped playing the monk in order to take part in the New Year festivities. Ragazzoni, the papal nuncio, also disapproved of the king's conduct. He told the Jesuit Edmond Auger that preserving the king's health was more important to God than all his devotions. Henry would have to account to God for his conduct as king of France, not as a monk. Auger agreed. He said that he had often given the same advice to the king, who had invoked his inability to apply himself to political matters. The pope himself disapproved of his religious excesses. He believed that Henry would be better employed fighting the Huguenots.³²

The Congregation of the Annunciation of Our Lady marched in a solemn procession through Paris each year on 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation, but not in 1586. For the king decided to make a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Chartres. Early on 26 March he, Father Auger, some 50 members of the congregation and 12 Capuchins met at their church. After Mass had been celebrated and a hymn to the Holy Ghost sung, the pilgrims set off. They all wore sackcloth. Some went on foot, others in coaches. They were only allowed to say the words: *Dominus vobiscum*, *Deo gratias* and *Benedicamus Domino*. Henry went first at a spanking pace. The pilgrims travelled 20 miles before stopping at a church to sing the vespers of the Madonna. Only then were they able to eat simply while listening to readings from Scripture. They then stopped at another church to receive further instructions from the king before reaching Chartres in the evening. The pilgrims then processed to the cathedral carrying a white cross. Only their sobs broke the silence. Once inside the cathedral, they kissed the floor; then listened to two castrati singing a hymn to the Madonna. The adoration of the cross followed. The third day was spent in devotions and in the evening the pilgrims listened to a sermon given by a Capuchin. Next morning, Henry rose early, heard mass and ordered the return to Paris. He again covered the whole distance on foot through wind, rain and mud at a spanking pace few could imitate. Only 14 arrived in Paris with him; the rest followed later. One Capuchin nearly died. Henry then took part in another procession through the streets of Paris before performing more devotions in the church of the Capuchins.³³ L'Estoile commented: 'This is how this good prince ... lives more like a Capuchin than a king. No longer liking war, his battlefield is a cloister and his cuirass a penitent's sackcloth.'³⁴

³² Lynn, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians*, pp. 151–2.

³³ Lynn, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians*, p. 172.

³⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 182.

A Reforming Monarch

It would be a mistake to imagine that Henry III relied exclusively on divine intervention to cure the ills of his kingdom. He was passionately committed to reform and worked extremely hard to bring it about, often against overwhelming odds. In May 1579 he published the Ordinances of Blois, 'the largest single legislative enterprise of the sixteenth-century French state'.³⁵ The result of months of reflexion, consultation and discussion, it was Henry's response to the *cabiers* submitted by the Estates of 1576. The text originally contained 369 clauses dealing with topics as wide-ranging as the church, the judiciary, the nobility, the army, the royal domain and taxation. Several clauses aimed at the eradication along Tridentine lines of abuses in the Gallican church in return for the confirmation of the clergy's privileges, franchises and exemptions. The Blois ordinances also abolished the sale of offices, though this remained an aspiration.³⁶ Clause 85 affirmed that the first duty of a prince was to be a good judge: 'on the days when our business allows it', Henry said, 'we propose to hold an open and public audience for those of our subjects who wish to submit their complaints and requests so that they may be dealt with and given justice'.³⁷ The ordinances set out to curb the powers of governors, limiting their number to 12, to ban seigneurial abuses such as the forced marriage of wealthy heiresses, to reclaim parts of the royal domain that had been alienated and to outlaw usury. They ordered marriages to be registered and proposed setting up a commission to codify ancient laws.³⁸ Other edicts bear witness to the extraordinary diligence of Henry's councillors. A sumptuary law of 1576, for instance, forbade commoners to dress like noblemen; another of 1587 tried to control price inflation by banning wool exports and the importation of high quality cloth.³⁹

In August 1582 Henry III dispatched teams of commissioners to six groups of provinces. Each team was headed by a senior churchman and included a privy councillor, a magistrate and a financial expert. They were instructed to seek the co-operation of local governors and their lieutenants and to visit all the main towns. Here, they were to summon the local notables and explain to them the king's intention to restore the edict of pacification so that his subjects should live henceforth in safety and protected by his laws and ordinances. To ensure

³⁵ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), p. 265.

³⁶ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, pp. 274–86.

³⁷ Gaston Zeller, *Les institutions de la France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1948), 164.

³⁸ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, pp. 268–73.

³⁹ Michel Pernot, *Henri III. Le roi décrié* (Paris, 2013), p. 306.

that the commissioners did not limit their activities to towns, they were ordered to stop regularly on their travels and conduct enquiries of local tax-collectors, officials of the royal domain and churchwardens. They were to receive and answer petitions. Where there were estates, they were to visit them and explain that the king's wish was not to increase taxation but 'to cure the evil which might entail the ruin of the state'. They were to turn a deaf ear to demands for a recall of the Estates-General, as their last meeting had been nothing more than a talking shop. On the other hand, the commissioners were to invite localities to send delegates to the king with ideas on how he might reduce his debts. They were also to investigate cases of fraud among royal officials, to punish offenders by fining or replacing them, and to look into the activities of the nobility. The commissioners carried sealed letters from the king advising them on particular issues in each locality. Their accommodation and security had been arranged by Henry with local governors and their expenses were refunded on a daily basis.⁴⁰

The commissioners were recalled to Paris for 10 September after they had been at work for six months. They reported to the king's council in October. 'The clerical order was, in general, presented as weakened and demoralized requiring a reform from without in order to sustain a renewal from within'.⁴¹ The commissioners also deplored the activities of armed bands in various parts of the kingdom and in most places they had found evidence of intimidation of the judiciary but little of corruption among the king's financial officials. Reflecting on petitions they had received, the commissioners noted that tax increases were a recurring complaint. Their work was complemented by reforms enacted by the king's council. In January 1583 it issued an edict on the royal forests and water resources and in March another on the *tailles*. This legislation has been described as bearing 'the hallmarks of Henrician reforming endeavours – a device to "codify" and "police", and a willingness to adopt measures that appeared to have a "virtuous circle" in their effects'.⁴²

On 5 October, following his return from the Bourbonnais, Henry summoned an Assembly of Notables to the château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.⁴³ Each notable received a personal invitation. Even Henri of Navarre received one, but, wily as ever, he declined it on the grounds that it would be unfitting for a prince to be a bearer of petitions. The 68 notables were divided into three chambers of roughly equal size. In addition to the aforementioned commissioners they

⁴⁰ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, pp. 314–20.

⁴¹ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 333.

⁴² Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 338.

⁴³ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, pp. 341–64.

included princes of the blood (including Charles, cardinal de Bourbon) and four princes (the dukes of Guise, Mercoeur, Aumale and Nevers) and, officers of state. At least 26 notables were councillors of state, and in each chamber there was at least one magistrate. Also among the notables were the three presidents of the Parlement of Paris, senior magistrates in financial matters, 10 commanders of *compagnies d'ordonnance* and half a dozen provincial governors. Protestant nobles were conspicuously absent. Henry determined the meeting's agenda: he wanted tax reform to be examined as well as the administration of justice, military matters and attacks on clerical property.

The minutes of the discussions at Saint-Germain have not survived, but we have an unofficial record of the first week that was kept by Richard Cook who had come to Paris with the English ambassador, Sir Henry Cobham. It shows how political and personal considerations easily deflected the notables from the business in hand. The king opened the proceedings, as usual, with a polished speech. He was followed by Cheverny, deputizing for the chancellor Birague who was dying. He praised Henry's 'ardent and sincere desire to restore all the good things to their ancient splendour'. His quest for the welfare of his subjects, he said, should inspire the notables. However, on the third day, Jean de La Guesle, a magistrate in the Parlement of Paris, challenged the privilege claimed by the archbishop and chapter of Rouen to ask, each Easter, for a convicted prisoner to be set free. This prompted an angry response from the cardinal-archbishop, Charles de Bourbon. He accused La Guesle of self-promotion and the judiciary in general of corruption. When La Guesle objected, the cardinal fell upon his knees before the king and implored him to restore Catholicism as the only religion in France. This angered Henry who exclaimed: 'Uncle, these speeches come not from yourself: I know from where they come; speak no more to me of it'. Whereupon he left the assembly. That evening the duc de Guise called on the king to excuse himself as a rumour was circulating to the effect that he was responsible for the cardinal's outburst. The idea, he said, had not occurred to him, and if it had 'he would have found a more able man ... to have delivered it than the cardinal of Bourbon'. In the absence of minutes it is difficult to say how much was accomplished by the notables. 'The undeniable fact is that the discussions at Saint-Germain-en-Laye were pursued in the midst of a court in turmoil in which Joyeuse and Épernon ruthlessly advanced their competitive interests for the king's favour, creating vortices of faction that threatened to swamp everything around them.'⁴⁴ The proceedings have been compared to those at the Palace Academy. 'None of the later Valois chose to educate themselves in

⁴⁴ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 348.

moral virtue quite like Henri III; none chose to inform himself of the ways of political virtue as he did at Saint-Germain'.⁴⁵

The debates at Saint-Germain have often been unfairly dismissed as little more than hot air, yet they did influence reforms enacted by the king in 1584 and 1585. He was no longer prepared to spend huge sums on the *archimignons* and showed a determination to curb expenditure on his court. On 12 February 1584 the Imperial ambassador reported that Henry was at Saint-Germain. For once, he missed the carnival festivities in Paris and was working 'to reform the manners and to regulate all the kingdom's estates'. Each day he was issuing a new regulation to bring down royal expenses for the benefit of the people. Various measures were taken to reform tax farms and, in December 1584, the salt-tax or *gabelle*, which was highly unpopular, was abolished by edict. Early in 1585 the royal budget was almost balanced, but the Catholic League soon wiped out all Henry's reforming efforts.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Greengrass, *Governing Passions*, p. 349.

⁴⁶ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III roi shakespearien* (Paris, 1985), pp. 518–20.

Chapter 13

The Catholic League

The prospect of a Huguenot becoming the next king of France plunged France into a more dangerous political crisis than any since 1559.¹ The succession to the French throne was governed by two so-called ‘fundamental laws’. The first was as old as the monarchy itself. It could be traced back to the baptism of Clovis in 496 A.D. Under this law, the king of France was ‘the Most Christian King’; he was God’s anointed and the first son of the church. The second law was the Salic law, first applied in 1316 to exclude Jeanne, the daughter of Louis X in favour of her uncle, Philip V. Thereafter, it was invoked to debar any woman from the succession. Henry III interpreted his plight as a sign of divine anger needing to be assuaged. He tried to do so by retiring to the oratory he had recently set up in the forest of Vincennes, but his prayers availed him nothing; he still had no son. This meant that his heir presumptive was his cousin, Henry of Navarre, who qualified as a male, but was ruled out as a heretic. He might have been absolved by converting to the Catholic faith, but he was a relapsed heretic and, as such, could not be absolved. If the Salic law was retained in its present form and the law excluding heretics upheld, then the heir to the throne had to be Charles, cardinal of Bourbon, who was 62 years old. A radical option was to declare the Capetian dynasty extinct and find an alternative. The most likely contender for this role was the house of Guise, a cadet branch of the ruling house of Lorraine, which claimed descent from the Emperor Charlemagne and had become the champion of the Catholic cause in France.

Desperately worried about the fate of the dynasty, Henry III decided that his best course of action was to seek Navarre’s conversion. He had relied to a large extent on his mother to bring peace to the kingdom. She had tried hard to achieve this during her travels in Guyenne, but her efforts had not been entirely successful. The time had come for Henry to act alone. Rather than look for a military solution, he preferred to seek Navarre’s conversion. Early in 1584, the latter had sent Duplessis-Mornay to Paris to find out about troubles (*remuements*) at court and, at the same time, warn the king that reports had

¹ M. Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henry IV: Politics, Power and Religious Belief in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), pp. 40–41.

reached Gascony of intrigues involving Philip II, the duke of Savoy and princes of the house of Lorraine.² On 14 April Mornay reported the following: 'In the past few days, His Majesty, before the fire after his dinner, and in the presence of M. du Maine and a large number of noblemen, after speaking at length about His Highness's illness (Anjou was still alive at the time) spoke as follows: 'To-day I recognize the king of Navarre as my one and only heir. He is a prince of good birth and nature. I have always liked him and I know that he likes me. He is somewhat hot-tempered and tetchy, but he is good at heart. I assure myself that my humours will please him and that we will get on well together'.³

On 15 May 1584 the duc d'Épernon left Paris with a suite of 200 noblemen. He said he was going to Gascony to take the waters and to see his mother at Caumont near Toulouse, but his real purpose was to meet Navarre and try to persuade him to become a Catholic. The talks, being strictly private, have left no official record. Épernon kept in touch with the king throughout his mission, but his messages tell us nothing about the talks themselves; they were usually to recommend some local official or magistrate for some promotion or favour.⁴ Épernon and Navarre had their first meeting at Saverdun on 13 June. They met again at Pamiers on the 25 May and at Escosse four days later. By then, news of Anjou's death had reached them, injecting more urgency into the talks. Between 9 and 11 July Épernon was sumptuously received by Navarre at Pau. The duke remained in Gascony for a month. Another meeting with Navarre took place at Nérac on 6 August. Whatever the latter may have said, he did not change his faith, yet the king does not seem to have been unduly disappointed. Even after Épernon's return, he continued 'to give many signs that, in the event of a succession, the crown should go to the king of Navarre'.

Next in line to the throne after Navarre was his uncle, Charles, cardinal de Bourbon, who was not disqualified by his faith. Henry III was keen to find out if he had any designs on the throne. During the summer of 1584 he called on the cardinal at his palace of Gaillon in Normandy. The two men talked in an open gallery where they could be easily overheard. Speaking as if in jest, Henry asked Bourbon if it was true that he was planning to displace his nephew on the throne. The cardinal replied that such an idea had never crossed his mind, but, pressed by Henry, he admitted that, if the occasion arose, he did think the throne should be his. Smiling and patting him on the shoulder, Henry said: 'My good friend,

² *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, p. 203, No. 5226.

³ Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Henri IV* (Paris, 1982), p. 332.

⁴ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seysse, 2000), p. 580.

the Châtelet (Paris) would give it to you, but the Court (the Parlement) would take it away!' He was seen to chuckle as he walked away.⁵

Fear among French Catholics of an armed Protestant rising was exacerbated by talks between Henry and two representatives of Henry of Navarre: Philippe Duplessis-Mornay and the comte de Laval. They came to Paris in October 1584 with a petition from a Protestant assembly recently held at Montauban which had decided not to return the security towns they had been granted temporarily in recent edicts of pacification. On 10 December Henry agreed to extend Protestant occupation of the towns by one or two years. Encouraged by this concession, Navarre's representatives pressed him to declare war on Spain.

Sinister developments were, meanwhile, taking place in Paris where Épernon's mission had set off alarm bells. It was said that he had taken 200,000 *écus* to Navarre to raise an army. Fearful for the future of their faith, a group of Catholics met in secret to discuss ways of defending it. They were not proletarians, as royalist historians of the seventeenth century would have us believe, but bourgeois, including clergy and lawyers. They included Charles Hotman, receiver of the bishop of Paris, and two well-known preachers, Jean Prévost and Jean Boucher, the *curés* of Saint-Séverin and Saint-Benoît respectively. Both had close ties to the university of Paris. Another Catholic militant was Mathieu de Launoy, a canon of Soissons. They were joined by some 50 men who saw the need to resist the tyrannical ambitions of the king of Navarre. Their leaders became known as *les Seize* after the 16 districts into which Paris was divided. Meeting in secret, they took an oath to fight the heretics and formed a society directed by a council of about 10 members. What they did not know was that there was a spy in their midst. He was Nicolas Poulain, a lieutenant of the *prévôt* of Paris. He attended their meetings and kept the king informed of their activities.⁶

The Guises

At the same time, a parallel development to defend the Catholic faith was taking place among the nobility. This was led by Henri, third duc de Guise and eldest son of duc François, who had been assassinated by a Huguenot outside Orléans in 1563. A tall, majestic figure with a facial scar – visible proof of his bravery –

⁵ *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 4, pp. 150–51.

⁶ Sylvie Daubresse, *Le Parlement de Paris ou La Voix de la Raison (1559–1589)* (Geneva, 2005), p. 418.

Henri (known for that reason as *le balafré*) was, it seems, genuinely committed to defeating heresy. But he also resented the fact that the king had not given him a major command as a reward for his victory at Dormans in 1575. Although Guise was officially the head of the king's household, he was no more than a figurehead, for Henry III insisted on running it himself. Nor was he as powerful as he would have liked. He had inherited large debts from his father and was excluded from the circle of favourites whom the king liked to spoil. His annual revenue from offices and pensions amounted to around 32,000 *livres*, far below the huge sums netted by the *archimignons*, Épernon and Joyeuse. As from 1576, Guise was forced to sell lands and borrow large sums by creating *rentes*. His debts, which, according to Brantôme, amounted to 250,000 *écus* in 1583 obliged him to reduce the size of his household, yet he managed to recruit a large body of followers. They came mostly from Champagne, Picardy, Burgundy and Upper Normandy. Prominent among them was François de Roncherolles, sieur de Maineville, who acted as intermediary between the Catholic nobles and the Catholic League in Paris. Aiding the duke were his two brothers: Charles, duc de Mayenne, and Louis cardinal of Guise and archbishop of Rheims. As a royal commander, Mayenne had captured Brouage in 1577 before fighting the Huguenots in Dauphiné. He was also governor of Burgundy. His brother, the cardinal, was much engaged in church reform along the lines laid down by the Council of Trent.

In the spring of 1584 Henri de Guise began to manifest openly his refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of Navarre's claim to the throne. He fraternized with cardinal de Bourbon and after gathering a large suite, partly drawn from Anjou's former household, he demonstrated his dissatisfaction with current royal policy by quitting Paris during the summer. This upset the king, who, on 14 August 1584, admitted to Villeroy: 'I am like those who see themselves drowning'.⁷ Once again, he looked to his mother, Catherine de' Medici, to extricate him from his predicament. In September 1584 Nancy, the capital of the duchy of Lorraine, became the venue for a conference of Catholic nobles that was to prove crucial to the future of the French kingdom. The attendance consisted of Henri de Guise and his brothers, Mayenne and the cardinal of Guise, the baron de Sennecey, and François de Roncherolles, *seigneur* de Maineville representing the cardinal of Bourbon. They decided to form a league and pool their resources. Father Claude Mathieu, a Jesuit, was dispatched to Rome to win the backing of Pope Gregory XIII. He broached the possibility of assassinating Henry III, but the pope did not think this could be done with a clear conscience.

⁷ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, No. 5494, p. 314.

But, as Mathieu reported to the duc de Nevers, Pope Gregory went on to say: 'If one could seize his person and remove those people around him who are the cause of the kingdom's ruin and replace them by men who will bridle him, give him sound advice and see that he acts on it, that would be good'.⁸ As he returned from Rome, Father Mathieu visited Switzerland and negotiated the hire of 6,000 mercenaries. Madame de Montpensier, sister of the duc de Guise, and others set about raising large loans from rich Parisians and also selling some of the duke's lands. Henry III, it seems, was unaware of these transactions. He had no representative in Rome for nearly a year after the death of Paul de Foix in May 1584. Cardinal Pellevé, who had charge of French affairs, was a League supporter. The absence on health grounds of the secretary of state, Villeroy, also deprived Henry of vital information about Spanish intrigues.



Figure 13.1 Portrait of Henri de Lorraine (1549–88), third duc de Guise, known as '*le balafre*' (tempra on panel) French school sixteenth century. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

⁸ Nicolas Le Roux, 'Mettre la main à la plume. Information, mobilisation et conciliation à l'aube de la Ligue' in *Le Bruit des armes*, ed. Jérémie Foa and Paul-Alexis Mellet (Paris, 2012), pp. 235–6.

Reports were reaching Henry about the Spanish ambassador, Bernardino de Mendoza, spending vast sums on stirring up trouble in France, but they did not seem to worry him. He doubtless believed that Philip II of Spain had far too much on his hands in the Netherlands to worry about France. In the past, Philip had been prepared to cause trouble in France regardless of religion in order to prevent the French from supporting the Dutch rebels, but Anjou's death changed everything. The prospect of a Protestant eventually succeeding to the French throne caused Philip to revise his policy in France. His minister, Zúñiga, suggested three possible courses of action: open military intervention, an alliance with Henry III or a secret alliance with the French Catholics. As the first would be costly and Henry was deemed unreliable, Zúñiga recommended the third option. Noting, however, that the Catholics had no credible heir to the throne, he suggested that one of Philip's daughters by Elizabeth de Valois should marry the duke of Savoy. Following this advice, Philip offered the Guises his support. On 31 December his envoys signed a secret treaty at Joinville.⁹ The parties undertook to uphold the Catholic faith and to extirpate Protestantism from France and the Netherlands. They recognized cardinal de Bourbon as the lawful heir to the French throne and promised to see that the decrees of the Council of Trent were accepted as one of France's 'fundamental laws'. On becoming king, Bourbon was to abandon France's alliance with the Turks and stop privateering against Spanish shipping. Philip II promised to contribute 600,000 *écus* within the first six months of an armed rising.¹⁰ This sum was to be reimbursed by Bourbon once he had become king of France and by his successors. A place in the alliance was reserved for the duc de Nevers, who was torn between his Catholic faith and his affection for Henry III, and another for the duc de Mercoeur, the queen's brother, whose loyalties were divided between the houses of Valois and Lorraine. Charles III duke of Lorraine preferred to lie low at this stage. He approved of the treaty but did not wish to offend his brother-in-law, Henry III, with whom he had cordial relations. He merely agreed to advance part of the Spanish subsidy.¹¹ Philip II's decision to support the Catholic League was primarily intended to avert a French military intervention in the Netherlands. Many French princes were pressing for a war against Spain, including Épernon. The Dutch States-General were also desperately seeking foreign support. They sent a delegation to Paris who were received by Henry on 13 February 1585 and again on the 22 February. The delegates even offered to acknowledge him

⁹ Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, 1998), p. 172.

¹⁰ Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996), p. 115.

¹¹ BnF, ms.fr. 3363, f.9.

as their king in return for his aid. Henry appointed three of his closest advisers to examine the Dutch offer. Elizabeth I of England also wanted Henry to assist Spain's enemies. This was why an extraordinary English embassy, led by the earl of Derby, came to Paris to offer Henry the Order of the Garter. The ceremony took place at the church of the Augustins on 28 February 1585.¹²

If Henry was not as well informed as he should have been about foreign intrigues, he was aware that the Guises were supplying their followers with horses and arms and also of suspicious activities at the Hôtel de Guise in Paris. This was why he issued a declaration at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 11 November 1584 forbidding the creation of armed associations. He also looked to his own security. He had not forgotten that 22 years earlier, François de Guise had virtually kidnapped his mother and brother, Charles IX, in the name of 'the triumvirs'. He may also have been influenced by the assassination of the Dutch leader, William of Orange in July 1584. So, in December, he set up a new bodyguard at the Louvre consisting of 45 young noblemen who took an oath of loyalty and obedience. They served 15 at a time; occupied a room, day and night, close to his own; and were expected to call on him each evening to receive his orders. The 'Forty-five' were chosen by Épernon and Joyeuse from among their own clients. Their annual wages were 1,200 *écus* and Henry gave each of them 500 *écus* to buy horses. As the new bodyguard settled in the Louvre, the king dismissed a large number of household officials whom he regarded as less trustworthy. This provided Guise and the Leaguers with another grievance which they hastened to exploit. They spread the rumour that the 'Forty-five' were low-born cut-throats from Gascony who sought to enrich themselves by any means, however unscrupulous. In reality, they all belonged to what has become known as the 'secondary nobility' (*noblesse seconde*) which periodically helped to rejuvenate the ranks of the old nobility. Most of them owned châteaux and large fiefs in Languedoc and Gascony. Their captain, François II de Montpezat, belonged to an ancient and powerful family of the Agenais. Not all, however, proved trustworthy. A Gascon, called Montaud, who had falsely accused Elbeuf, a cousin of the Guises, of offering him 10,000 *écus* to murder the king, was executed in Paris on 14 May 1585.¹³ Henry showed him no mercy, for he wanted men whom he could trust absolutely.¹⁴

¹² L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 12–13; Roy C. Strong, 'Festivals for the Garter Embassy at the court of Henri III' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 22 (1959), pp. 60–70; Nicolas Le Roux, *Le Roi, la Cour, l'État. De la Renaissance à l'Absolutisme* (Seyssel, 2013), p. 89.

¹³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 26–7.

¹⁴ Constant, *La Ligue*, pp. 142–4.

The first signs of a mobilization by the League occurred in South-West France in mid-February 1585. Henry III immediately ordered the governor of Brouage to investigate and ordered marshal de Matignon, the lieutenant-general in Guyenne, to post infantry in the towns of his *gouvernement*.¹⁵ The next sign of trouble was in the north. On 26 February Henry instructed the duc de Guise to restore order to his *gouvernement* of Champagne after reports of unrest there had reached him. On 1 March he wrote to Mercoeur, governor of Brittany and to Joachim de Dinteville, lieutenant-general of Champagne, to look into troop levies in their areas.¹⁶ He evidently hoped to nip troubles in the bud. At the same time, he ended his talks with the Dutch Estates. Their delegates left Paris empty-handed on 10 March. Henry explained that he had not wanted to disturb the peace of Christendom. He certainly did not want to become involved in a foreign war just as France seemed on the brink of a civil conflict. At this very moment, Paris was found to be harbouring a clandestine arms trade. Henry ordered the municipal authorities to seize any unauthorized consignments. On 12 March a boat-load of weapons – arquebuses, pikes and body-armour – was intercepted at Lagny on the River Marne.¹⁷ The cargo had been bought by an agent of cardinal de Guise. Henry's alarm is reflected in his correspondence: he wrote no less than 12 letters on 12 March and 74 between the first and 12 March as compared with only 34 in the whole of February.¹⁸ Henri de Guise angrily demanded the return of the arms, claiming that they were meant for his own security at Joinville. On 16 March Henry wrote to Guise, Mayenne and to cardinal de Bourbon asking them to explain their activities while pretending not to believe the reports he had been receiving about them.¹⁹ The tone of his letter to the cardinal was different. Addressing him as his 'second father', he asked for advice. Writing to Navarre, Henry informed him of the defensive measures he was taking and urged him not to act precipitately.²⁰ He wrote to him four times in a single week. Navarre, for his part, felt sure that the League wanted to secure the repeal of the edicts of pacification. He ordered the superintendant of his household to hasten the levy of German *reiters* and the representatives of the Protestant churches at court to tell the king of unauthorized troop movements in Guyenne.

¹⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 5, p. 389, No. 5704.

¹⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, p. 394, No. 5721 and 5723.

¹⁷ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 16; *Registre des Délibérations de la ville de Paris, 1499–1628*, ed. F. Bonnardot and P. Guérin (Paris, 1888–1902), Vol. 8, p. 440.

¹⁸ Nicolas Le Roux, 'Mettre la main à la plume', pp. 240–43.

¹⁹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 6, p. 408, Nos 5766–8.

²⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Boucher, Vol. 5, p. 407, No. 5763.

Many nobles joined the League, including the duc de Nevers, the comte de Brissac, the baron de Sennecey, disgraced *mignons* and most of Anjou's former followers. Military operations began at the same time. After raising troops in Champagne, Guise captured Châlons on 21 March. Soon afterwards, he had a long conversation with the lieutenant-general, Dinteville. The duke expressed his dissatisfaction with the king. He complained that he had been driven to act in self-defence. Next day, Dinteville wrote a long and extremely pessimistic report to the king. The rebels, he said, had raised four infantry regiments and were expecting 6,000 *reiters* and a regiment of landsknechts. He concluded: 'undoubtedly the die is cast and the Rubicon crossed so that without God's special grace it will be necessary to use armed force'.²¹ Addressing his followers on 26 March, Guise accused the king of relying on favourites who had neither birth nor virtue to commend them. At the same time, he recalled the valour of his own father and the ideal of sacrifice that had inspired his house. By alluding to its imperial origins, Guise implicitly challenged the legitimacy of the Valois and Bourbon dynasties. He may even have been thinking of eventually claiming the throne for himself.

On 29 March the sieur de La Roquette, the cardinal of Guise's agent who had sought to buy arms in Paris, was arrested in Champagne and brought to Paris for questioning.²² This alarmed the Leaguers who had hoped to keep their military preparations secret. Questioned by Henry III in person, La Roquette revealed that the Guises were building a vast military machine with the help of Philip II of Spain, the pope and Italian princes. He also listed their demands: recognition of a Catholic heir to the throne, an end to religious toleration, the suppression of new taxes, free access for great lords to the king and the calling of the Estates-General. Henry warned Dinteville to expect an armed rising on 6 April.²³ Guise was expected to march on Paris. The secretary of state, Villeroy, was pessimistic about the situation. Writing to the Venetian ambassador, he regretted that the king had not attended sooner to the threats facing him. Given his weakness, Villeroy believed that his only option was to negotiate with the rebels.

²¹ Edouard de Barthélemy, 'Correspondance inédite de M. de Dinteville lieutenant-général au gouvernement de Champagne' in *Revue de Champagne et de Brie*, Vol. 7 (1879), p. 126.

²² Bonnardot and Guerin, *Registre des Délibérations de la ville de Paris*, Vol. 8, p. 440.

²³ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. VI, p. 14, No. 5816.

The Péronne Manifesto

On 21 March the Leaguers published a manifesto at Péronne, calling on all nobles, towns and communities to resist the subversion of the Catholic faith and of the state by Henry of Navarre and the duke of Épernon. The manifesto was probably written in the entourage of cardinal de Guise, possibly at the instigation of the Jesuit, Claude Mathieu. It took the form of a declaration by cardinal de Bourbon and did not even mention the duc de Guise. But everyone knew that the cardinal was simply the mouthpiece of the Guise princes. Their choice of Péronne showed that they aimed to revive the League of 1576. Although the manifesto mentioned the threat posed to the state by the absence of a dauphin and by the mobilization of foreign troops by the Huguenots, it focused mainly on other grievances. The Guises complained of favourites ‘who, having insinuated their way into the king’s friendship ... have captured his authority with a view to retaining the greatness they had usurped’. Although not named, the *archimignons* were the obvious target. They were accused of ‘excluding from His Majesty’s private conversation, not only the princes and nobility; but all who are closest to him, allowing access only to their own’. The *mignons* and their friends, the manifesto complained, had taken over all offices and favours and were exercising the functions of ministers they had ousted. Assisted by crooked financiers, who were for the most part Italians, they had appropriated revenues due to the king. Worse still, Henry III had failed to honour the promise he had made at the Estates-General in 1576 of reuniting his subjects within the Catholic faith. By treating with the reformers, he had undermined the authority of the Catholic princes and lords. Furthermore, the burden of taxation weighed heavily on the whole of society. It was time to restore the rights of the nobility, to abolish taxes and subsidies set up since Henry III’s accession, to guarantee the rights of the parlements and office-holders, and – above all – to call a meeting every three years of the Estates-General.²⁴ In Pasquier’s opinion, the authors of the manifesto ‘all wanted to share the cake rather than see it distributed to two or three’. Defending their material interests, such as ‘house’ and honour, was at least as important to them as the defence of the Catholic faith, for they had good reason to fear that their exclusion from power by the *mignons* would become worse if a Protestant became king. The path to honours would be closed to them, thereby reducing the size of the *clientèles* by which the greatness of their lineages

²⁴ *Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France*, ed. L. Cimber and F. Danjou, xi, p. 9; Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996), pp. 122–5.

was measured. For all its talk of religion, the Péronne manifesto was, in essence, a malcontents' charter.²⁵

Responding to the manifesto, Henry III tried to justify his actions. If heresy still existed in France, he said, the Estates-General of 1576 had only themselves to blame as they had denied him the funds needed to fight the Huguenots. Yet, he argued, the peace they had imposed had benefited the Catholic faith. Its worship had been restored in several towns and the church had reformed itself. He himself had bestowed benefices on worthy men and encouraged pious works. As for the royal succession, he complained that it was being discussed by the public as if he and the queen were of no account. War, he continued, was not the answer: it would bring only disaster to his subjects. But Henry prepared to defend himself. He asked the banker, Zamet, to raise a loan for the hire of Swiss troops and took steps to protect Paris from a surprise attack. The *dizainiers* guarding the city's gates were ordered to submit daily reports to the governor on people entering or leaving the capital. A ban was imposed on river traffic between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. Parisians were also ordered to disclose the names of all lodgers, including servants. On 30 March the king reorganized the militia. Trustworthy men were appointed to lead its companies and, on 2 April, Henry inspected them himself. His measures checked the League's expansion for a time, but failed to check the growing popularity of Henri de Guise.

In April, the League launched its offensive. Guise's army occupied the towns of Toul and Verdun, but not Metz which was being defended by Épernon's troops. While Mayenne took Dijon, Mâcon and Auxonne, the dukes of Elbeuf and Aumale were active in Normandy and Picardy. Mercoeur, the queen's brother, stirred in Brittany where he was governor. Others who followed their lead included La Châtre, who occupied Bourges, and d'Entragues who, entrenched in Orléans, greeted royal troops with an artillery salvo. Only the Midi stayed loyal to Henry III. Matignon and Joyeuse held Bordeaux and Toulouse respectively. Catherine de' Medici wanted an end to the fighting. She urged the king to open talks with the Guises in the first instance. According to Pasquier, 'venomous tongues' claimed that they would not have taken up arms without her consent but this has never been proved.²⁶ During talks at Épernay between 9 April and 28 June, Catherine worked hard to defend her son's interests. Unwell

²⁵ Estienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, ed. D. Thickett (Geneva, 1966), p. 253.

²⁶ Jean-Marie Constant, *Les Guise* (Paris, 1984), p. 134.

at the time, she conducted negotiations from her bed, but to no avail.²⁷ The Guises merely played for time as they built up their forces. They aimed not only to destroy Protestantism in France, but also to acquire governorships and surety towns. Guise complained to Catherine of Épernon's talks with Navarre which, he believed, threatened the future of Catholicism in France. He then left the negotiating table. Catherine asked her son-in-law, Charles III of Lorraine, to act as go-between, but he was too committed to the League to do so. The queen-mother's talks with the cardinals of Bourbon and Guise also failed. On 13 May, her secretary, Pinart, informed Henry III's secretary, Brulart, that she was 'more angry and troubled than he had ever known her'.²⁸ The Guises were demanding as many surety towns as had been conceded to the Huguenots. Writing to Nevers on 28 May, Henri de Guise announced: 'I shall be leaving soon to receive my *reiters* and rapidly to assemble forces everywhere in order to be ready to conclude things as they should be, stick in hand, then to fall on the Protestants'. 'All of this,' wrote Catherine, 'makes me understand that he [Guise] is playing with words'. She 'could see very well, as did everyone else, that it was not religion which motivated them [the Guises], but the wish to surprise towns and seize money'. Early in June, Catherine reported that Aumale had occupied villages around Rheims. 'If this goes on,' she wrote, 'all is lost, everyone is in despair.' She estimated that Guise disposed of 25,000 men and 2,000 horses, excluding the forces of Elbeuf, Brissac and others. On 10 June, the Leaguers proposed that the king should issue an edict against heresy and entrust them with its execution. At the same time, they spread a rumour that Catholic troops were about to attack Paris.

The Peace of Nemours (1585)

On 7 July Catherine signed the treaty of Nemours with the Leaguers on Henry III's behalf. This was to be the first of a series of humiliations which he had to endure. In addition to promising to pay the troops that had been raised against him, he conceded a number of surety towns, the lion's share going to Guise, whose clients also received favours, pensions and governorships. An edict arising from the treaty banned Protestant worship and ordered all pastors to leave the kingdom at once. Their flocks were given six months in which to abjure or go into

²⁷ N.M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State in the Age of Catherine de Medici* (London, 1962), p. 258.

²⁸ Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State*, p. 259.

exile. Huguenots were debarred from all public offices and were to hand over all the surety towns they held.²⁹ On his way to the Parlement to oversee registration of the new edict, Henry said to cardinal de Bourbon that he had signed two such edicts: 'one in 1577 against his conscience whereby he had tolerated the exercise of the new religion but which had given him much pleasure as it had brought peace to the whole of France, and now another in line with his conscience from which he derived no pleasure as he could see that it would bring universal ruin to his kingdom'.³⁰ The peace solved nothing. The various parties continued to distrust each other and to position themselves in readiness for an eventual succession crisis. Guise wanted to destroy Épernon's political influence while the League remained under arms. Henry III now looked to Henry of Navarre as his only possible saviour, still hoping that he might become a Catholic. On 22 July Philippe de Lenoncourt, Nicolas Brulart de Sillery and two theologians of the Sorbonne left Paris in a renewed effort to bring this about, but Navarre refused to convert. On 10 August he and Condé met Montmorency-Damville near Lavaur. They renewed the alliance between the Protestants and the 'United Catholics' and issued a manifesto denouncing 'those of the house of Lorraine who plan to extinguish the house of France and take its place'. While affirming their belief in the indestructibility of Protestantism, Navarre and Condé promised to respect Catholics and their religion 'having always believed that consciences should be free'. They and Damville re-affirmed their loyalty to Henry III. Their quarrel, they affirmed, was not with him but with the League.³¹ By renewing their alliance with Damville and the 'United Catholics', the Huguenots were able to consolidate their hold on Guyenne and Languedoc. In Dauphiné, Lesdiguières recaptured several fortresses, and in Poitou, Condé laid siege to Brouage only to be put to flight by Henri de Joyeuse, the favourite's brother.

Henry could have silenced his critics by fighting the Huguenots, but he claimed that he was too poor to do so. If the Catholics wanted him to fight, he said, they should bear the cost. On 11 August he ordered the city of Paris to pay him 400,000 *écus* for the payment of three armies during one month, and, on the same day, he summoned the presidents of the Parlement to the Louvre, to tell them that he would no longer pay the court's judges. It was lack of money, he said, not lack of Catholic zeal, that had caused him to hesitate for so long before breaking the edict of pacification. He did not wish to be ruined on his own.

²⁹ N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 364–5.

³⁰ Constant, *Les Guise*, p. 135; L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 33.

³¹ Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Henry IV* (Paris, 1982), p. 355.

At the same time Henry informed cardinal de Guise of his intention to tap the clergy's wealth. 'As this is a religious war,' he said, 'I am persuaded that I can in all conscience and even must help myself to the church's revenues and I will do so without scruple.'³²

On 8 August 1585 Henry was informed by Saint-Gouard, his ambassador in Rome, that pope, Sixtus V, had ordered him to leave in retaliation for Henry's refusal to accept Fabio Frangipani as papal nuncio. Though irritated by the news, the king could not afford to retaliate as he hoped Sixtus would agree to his seizure of church property in France. Ambassadors were somewhat baffled by his policy. The general consensus was that he desired peace, not war. His personal conduct puzzled everyone: in spite of the situation or perhaps because of it, he threw himself into a new round of piety. On 15 August he rode to the Bois de Vincennes for four days of devotions with his Hieronymites and returned there several times in September before returning to Paris for four days of devotions in honour of St. Jerome. The Jesuit, Edmond Auger, was blamed for this religious frenzy. It was said that Henry could not dispense with his company even for one hour. 'I understand,' Ragazzoni reported, 'that this new and greater fervour of devotion has been kindled in [the king's] mind by the work and preaching primarily of a French Jesuit priest named "il Padre Emondo Ocherio" who also participates in the spiritual exercises of His Majesty'.³³

On 9 September Sixtus V issued a bull excommunicating the Protestant princes, Henry of Navarre and Henri de Condé, and depriving them of all their rights to the French throne.³⁴ This delighted Guise, who wrote to Mendoza that the bull would assist him and his followers 'marvellously' to achieve their aim of exterminating heresy. It also proved to be a useful weapon against Henry III. It called for his assistance, but he was not so keen to comply. He told the papal nuncio Ragazzoni that the pope wished him 'to serve as his provost in France'.³⁵ His refusal to publish the bull in France on the grounds that it broke the Salic law was taken by the Leaguers as further proof of his duplicity. Preachers denounced him as the secret ally of the Huguenot leaders. In Rome, he was accused of protecting heretics in secret while denouncing them in public.

As though to confound his critics, Henry III published on 7 October a new edict against the Huguenots harsher than that of the 18 July. They were declared

³² Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), p. 516.

³³ A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva, 1973), pp. 147–8.

³⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 41.

³⁵ *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane* (Paris, 1865–72), ed. Abel Desjardins (Paris, 1859–86), Vol. 4, p. 594.

to be rebels and their allies traitors. Their property was to be sold for the crown's benefit and they were now given only a fortnight (instead of six months) to convert or leave the kingdom. A house to house search was to be made for Condé's followers.³⁶ By appearing to champion the League's cause, the king hoped to take the wind out of its sails. On 30 November Navarre responded to the new edict by ordering the confiscation of property belonging to noblemen and churchmen who had joined 'the enemies of the state'. He wrote to Catherine de' Medici warning her that the papacy was seeking to dispose of the French crown as it wished and that Henry III himself might find himself deposed.³⁷

Propaganda alone could not win a war: money was needed to pay for arms. When the clergy met in October, Henry III ordered his finance minister, Bellièvre, to demonstrate that four armies were needed to fight the Huguenots at the cost of two million *livres* per month. The clergy reluctantly agreed to the sale of church lands worth 50,000 *écus* per annum. Henry needed more. He sent the bishop of Paris to Rome in order to get papal permission for a bigger sale of church property. Sixtus V agreed to an alienation of 100,000 *écus* in two instalments. This angered the clergy who invoked their traditional exemption from taxation. Henry threatened a *lit-de-justice* to enforce publication of the bull, but before any proceeds from the sale of church property could reach his coffers, war with the Huguenots had got under way. Henry, it seems, became profoundly dispirited. Lucinge, the ambassador of Savoy, reported on 4 February 1586 that the king, with tears in his eyes, had told Épernon, Joyeuse, Villeroy and Maulévrier: 'They have disturbed me and the peace of my kingdom. They are almost dictating to me. They want both my crown and my skin ... If I am pressed, I will retire alone.'³⁸ Was he thinking of abdicating; even perhaps of retiring to a monastery? We cannot be sure. What is certain is that his courage revived after he had detached a number of noblemen from the League. They included François d'O and his brother, the count of Saulx; also d'Entragues, the former *mignon* and lover of the king's sister, Marguerite. Catherine de' Medici pulled off a veritable triumph by winning over the duc de Nevers, head of one of the most powerful houses in France. Beauvais-Nangis also left the League.

In March, Henry III gave Henri de Guise command of 50 companies of infantry and between 5,000 and 6,000 cavalry. Another royal army under Marshal d'Aumont was sent to Auvergne and Languedoc, while Biron was pitted against

³⁶ Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition*, p. 364.

³⁷ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III, roi shakespearien* (Paris, 1985) p. 582.

³⁸ René de Lucinge, *Lettres sur la cour d'Henri III en 1586*, ed. A. Dufour (Geneva, 1966), p. 53

Condé. But Henry himself seemed reluctant to fight. It seems that he was still hoping for peace. On 26 March he wrote to Villeroy: 'I am going to Chartres. I will return in the evening of Tuesday in Holy Week without fail. I recommend to you all my affairs which you are to dispatch. Tell your companions not to send me anything unless it is urgent, as I am going these seven days to serve God. I want you to sign an evocation which I will send you. Farewell, show everything to the queen. Act in my place until my return. Keep an eye open on this town during my absence so that no evil may happen.'³⁹ Fighting, in the meantime, continued. Mayenne entered Guyenne, capturing Monségur, a Huguenot stronghold, but he advanced so slowly that Navarre was able to join Condé in the west. As the king's generals were accused at court of lethargy, Henry III gave commands to Joyeuse and Épernon. The former was sent to Auvergne and Languedoc; the latter to Dauphiné and Provence. The trust which Henry placed in them is reflected in letters to Villeroy. In June, Henry wrote: 'I am sending you the dispatch from Provence which I have read in full. The arrival of M. d'Épernon in that province is much needed.' In August, he mentioned Joyeuse: 'I know, Villeroy, that you love him. Care for him as much as you love me...'⁴⁰

Both sides in the war were desperately poor. On 16 June Henry went to the Parlement to secure registration of 27 fiscal edicts, a legislative avalanche that angered the Parisians.⁴¹ Placards insulting him and his mother appeared all over the capital. Meanwhile, the English queen, Elizabeth I, offered Navarre 50,000 crowns. She then doubled this sum after learning of Spanish victories in the Netherlands. The money was paid to John Casimir, regent of the Palatinate, who also received a substantial Danish subsidy. A zealous Calvinist, he had organized the military campaign of 1576 against Henry III. He now promised to raise an army of 8,000 *reiters* to assist the Huguenots and appointed a little-known captain, Fabian von Dohna, to lead it. As the threat of foreign invasion loomed, Catherine again offered Henry III her intercession. She hoped to reach some understanding with Navarre. Henry accepted her offer as he set off to take the waters at Pougues. Ragazzoni warned him of papal displeasure if Rome got to hear of his talks with a relapsed heretic. He urged the king to consult the pope before making any religious concessions to the Huguenots. The nuncio also warned Catherine, but she pressed on regardless with her mission. Before leaving Paris, she assured the pope that neither she nor her son would do anything 'unworthy of very Christian princes'.

³⁹ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, No. 6512, p. 304.

⁴⁰ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, No. 6721, p. 377.

⁴¹ Daubresse, *Le Parlement de Paris*, pp. 498–509.

While Catherine was staying at Chenonceau between 19 August and 23 October she sent the abbé Gadagne several times to Navarre at La Rochelle in the hope of persuading him to negotiate. At the same time, she kept in close touch with the king's ministers, Birague, Bellièvre and Villeroy. As Navarre raised objection after objection, Henry III wrote to Villeroy: 'I do not doubt that the difficulties are largely due to the king of Navarre', but he thought they might be overcome once Montmorency-Damville was out of the way. Meanwhile, Catherine urged the king's council, which had remained in Paris during the king's absence, to rescue the duc de Mayenne who had run into difficulties. By so doing, she hoped Navarre might become more amenable. Henry III complied with her request. In August he sent reinforcements to Mayenne and La Valette in Valence. The pope, meanwhile, expressed strong disapproval of Catherine's efforts. Henry, he said, would never be absolute or at peace in his kingdom as long as heresy was allowed to exist. In Paris and other towns, preachers accused the king of secretly dealing with Navarre and of compromising the success of Catholic armies by dragging his feet. Acting on his mother's advice, Henry ordered bishops, governors and lieutenants-general to silence his critics.

Henri de Guise, of course, would not hear of peace. Late in September, he met the cardinals of Guise and Bourbon at the abbey of Ourscamp, near Noyon. They decided to reject any peace settlement, to uphold the edict proscribing the Protestant faith and to fight on regardless of Henry III. On 8 October Guise informed the nuncio, Frangipani, that the king had agreed to avoid 'a mendacious peace'. 'We are strong enough,' he added, 'we can count on the support of the principal towns of the kingdom'. The cardinal of Guise, for his part, continued to mobilize the clergy. He and the cardinal of Bourbon issued a remonstrance that challenged the king's authority while calling for the reform of the French church. It questioned the king's right to appoint to the most important benefices as set up by the Concordat of 1516. The cardinals also denounced the court as a place where flatterers persuaded the king to favour the wicked rather than the good.⁴²

On 2 April Guise informed Mendoza that he had written to the pope, asking him to launch a crusade. He also asked Parma, governor of the Netherlands, to move his forces nearer to the French border and for 300,000 *écus* that Philip II had promised in the treaty of Joinville. The duke declared that he would never dismount from his horse until Catholicism had been firmly established in the kingdom and its enemies destroyed. After a failed attempt to capture Auxonne in the summer of 1586, he invaded the lands of the duc de Bouillon who had

⁴² Nicolas Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu* (Paris, 2006), p. 121.

given shelter to Huguenots fleeing from persecution. He laid siege to Sedan and Jametz, towns officially under Henry III's protection. Meanwhile, the duc d'Aumale gained control of Picardy. Corbie, Doullens and Le Crotoy fell into his hands and he would have taken Boulogne if Henry III had not prevented him placing the port at the disposal of the Spanish Armada. Catherine de'Medici, meanwhile, continued to try to win over Navarre. Regardless of her age (she was 67) and poor health, she travelled in winter along dreadful roads and put up in places threatened by gangs of pillagers. The Huguenots agreed in principle to talk, but repeatedly put her off. 'Dealing with them,' Catherine confided to Villeroy on 23 November, 'is mortifying. One must always start again ... One must really want to serve the king and the good of his state not to give up'. Eventually, she did meet Navarre at the château of Saint-Brice, near Cognac. She tried to persuade him to come to terms, but he just strung her along as he awaited confirmation that an army had been raised for him in Germany.⁴³

On 10 January 1587 Henry III spoke to a large gathering of princes, knights, councillors, magistrates, the mayor and *échevins* of Paris, and masters of requests whom he had summoned to the Louvre. He reminded them that his mother, regardless of her age, the harsh winter and the poor state of the roads, had entered into peace talks with the king of Navarre. He could now report that her efforts had been in vain. He had, therefore, decided to fight the Huguenots even if this meant risking his own life. As a first move, he had ordered the seizure of all their goods which were to be sold to the clergy, nobility and towns on terms favourable enough to encourage others to buy them as well. Regarding the conduct of the war so far, Henry admitted that mistakes had been made. He welcomed advice while expressing the belief that the rebels had been treated too softly. This had merely increased the kingdom's division. The rebels needed harsher treatment. Henry regretted that his orders had not been obeyed and urged his audience not to use the negligence of his officials to misrepresent his own intentions or the purpose of his mother's mission. Instead of blaming them and condemning their actions, they must unite to help him extirpate heresy from France. They must succeed by using force in place of moderation. But, first, they needed to build up a good stock of money with which to pay the army that would be needed to repel any foreign invasion. He was ready to lead it himself and to blockade the Huguenots in the provinces where they lay entrenched. Funding the war was his greatest worry. He had ordered a general search of all houses in Paris to find any Huguenots who might be hiding there so that they might be punished in an exemplary way. 'I have even decided,' he said, 'to banish

⁴³ Babelon, *Henri IV*, p. 270.

Du Cerceau (his favourite architect) if he refuses to attend mass in order to silence tittle-tattle and to set an example of obedience to my own commands regardless of any private consideration.' Henry also announced the setting up of a council consisting of cardinal de Bourbon, the chancellor of France and some prelates, lords and magistrates to see that his orders were carried out.⁴⁴ In his account of the Louvre meeting, L'Estoile tells us that the king made a brief pause after his announcement that he was ready to lead the army himself. This was filled with cries of joy and acclamations, but the response was quite different after Henry had turned to the mayor of Paris and other representatives of the city and asked them for a subsidy of 600,000 *écus* to be raised as a loan or *rente* by taxing the wealthiest Parisians. 'They became speechless and returned very angry, saying that they could see that there was a sting in the tail'.⁴⁵

Henry III also wrote two long letters to his mother at this time. In the first, he admitted that the only solution to France's crisis was for Navarre to abjure. Since he would not do so, the Huguenots needed to be shown that he, Henry, meant business and the unfortunate impression that he was negotiating with their leader had to be effaced. He had, therefore, ordered the confiscation and sale of all Huguenot property to help pay for the war. While dismissing Catherine's efforts as futile, he did not rule out the possibility of securing a truce with the Huguenots pending a meeting of the Estates-General. If this were to happen, the edict of 18 July would be suspended, not revoked. Henry concluded his letter by expressing the wish that some means, other than force, might be found of reuniting his subjects in the Catholic faith and relieving them of their sufferings. He also expressed the hope that Catherine might be able to reunite Navarre with his wife, Marguerite. His second letter ended with the following cry for help: 'Madam, these are truly my words and thoughts on these matters. I submit them for you to judge and beg you to give me your best advice'.⁴⁶ In mid-January 1587 Catherine moved from Cognac to Niort where she remained till 19 February. She welcomed an invitation from Navarre for further talks at Marans, but he backed out at the last minute. On 13 March the queen-mother returned to Chenonceau knowing that her mission had failed.

It was about this time that the Sixteen began to plot against the king. They thought of capturing him in the rue Saint Antoine as he was returning in his coach from Vincennes and locking him up in a church, but the idea was soon

⁴⁴ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, pp. 467–9, No. 6866.

⁴⁵ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 259–60.

⁴⁶ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, pp. 471–4; *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de La Ferrière and Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–1943), Vol. 9, pp. 138, 434–7.

dropped as it needed the backing of Guise who was away campaigning. So the Sixteen planned instead to seize a number of strategic points in the capital, but Poulain warned the king in the nick of time and the plot collapsed. On 9 March news reached Paris of the execution in England of Mary Queen of Scots. She was a former queen of France as well as a cousin of the Guises.⁴⁷ A torrent of abuse denouncing Elizabeth I, 'the English Jezabel' and her Huguenot allies poured from the League's pulpits and presses. Mary Stuart was elevated to the rank of a Catholic martyr and Henry III was accused of having betrayed her. His pleas for her life had fallen on deaf ears. All he could do now was to hold a service in her memory at Notre-Dame cathedral on 13 March. The attendance included members of the house of Guise and the funeral oration spoken by Renaud de Beaune, archbishop of Bourges, praised its contribution to the greatness of France and conservation of Christianity.⁴⁸ It stood in sharp contrast to the abuse the League was heaping on Henry III. He continued to be accused of underhand dealings with the Huguenots and denounced for not enforcing the edict ordering the seizure and sale of heretical property. A veritable flood of pamphlets attacking him poured off the League's printing presses. The number rose to 78 in 1587 as compared with 21 in 1586 and 17 in 1585.⁴⁹ The king was repeatedly accused of being a heretic. One pointed out that he had been christened Alexandre-Edouard. His godfathers had been Edward VI a schismatic and Antoine de Bourbon, the father of Henry of Navarre, a heretic.⁵⁰ Early in June 1587, Martin Roland, a founder of the Parisian League, denounced the king at a meeting in the Hôtel de Ville. He was arrested and taken to the Conciergerie, but soon released after the League had put pressure on the king. On 2 September a disturbance occurred in the university quarter of Paris after Henry had ordered the arrest of some preachers. People went about the streets shouting: 'To arms! My friends! The time has come for every good Catholic to come forward! The Huguenots plan to kill the preachers and all Catholics!' The tocsin of Saint Benoît rang out. The event became known as 'the happy day of Saint-Séverin', but it soon petered out after the king had once again backed down.⁵¹

The Sixteen now set about tightening the links between Paris and the other Leaguer towns. They also laid down rules for an action committee in each town.

⁴⁷ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 268–9.

⁴⁸ Keith Cameron, 'La polémique, la mort de Marie Stuart et l'assassinat de Henri III' in *Henri III et son temps*, ed. R. Sauzet (Paris, 1992), p. 186.

⁴⁹ Denis Pallier, *Recherches sur l'imprimerie à Paris pendant la Ligue (1586–94)* (Geneva, 1975), p. 55.

⁵⁰ Cameron, 'La polémique', p. 191.

⁵¹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 314.

For the time being, however, they offered Henry III an army of 24,000 men to repel the German *reiters* who were about to invade France in support of the Huguenots. The towns were to pay the troops and appoint their captains. If Henry refused, they were to be raised none the less. He would have to recognize the League's army or come out against it. A new form of oath was prepared for all Leaguers whereby the king was to be obeyed only if he behaved as a Catholic. It was deemed more necessary than ever that Navarre should never reach the throne. If the king were to die, the Estates-General were to be called by the Catholics who would elect cardinal de Bourbon, not to take the throne, but as a candidate qualified by his faith and virtues to be elected king. This left room for other candidates to enter the contest.

Early in 1587 the nuncio, Morosini, painted a sombre picture of the state of France in a letter to Pope Sixtus V. It was being torn apart by the rivalries of great nobles and by the hatreds of the populace. The nuncio offered a measured portrait of Henry III in which he insisted on the king's fervent piety and sincere wish to fight the heretics. He underlined the wretched state of the royal finances which hampered the king from acting decisively. Henry, the nuncio explained, was aware of his weakness. He was also afraid that a Protestant defeat would place him at the mercy of the League. Morosini thought Henry trusted Épernon more than himself, but explained that the duke was hated by the people. Guise was adored by them, but hated by the king. In the light of this report, Sixtus on 30 June 1587 allowed a second tranche of church property in France to be alienated. The first had yielded more than one million crowns to the crown. Sixtus ordered the nuncio to work for the union of Catholics around the king and to encourage the League's chiefs to treat him with respect and obedience. He advised him to stay clear of parties and to try to prevent the French crown from falling into Protestant hands for the 'glory of God', 'the triumph of Catholicism' and the 'ruin of heresy'. He added that it would be a good thing for the Tridentine decrees to become part of France's 'fundamental laws'. The pope's moderate stance did not please Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador, who put about a false letter in which Sixtus suggested that a great nobleman should be given command of the kingdom so to fight the heretics more effectively. Another embarrassment for the nuncio was the Gallican clergy's refusal to sell its property on the ground that the money would be used to feed the *mignons'* frivolous tastes rather than to fight the heretics.⁵²

On 12 April 1587 Cavriana, the Tuscan envoy, noted that preachers across France were calling on the people to arm. So far military operations had achieved

⁵² Constant, *La Ligue*, pp. 138–9.

little more than the capture of a few towns and the wasting of certain provinces. Money had also run out. Henry III sought the pope's permission to sell more church property. He also seized funds destined for the payment of *rentes* in Paris. This prompted a loud protest on 1 May from the mayor and *échevins*, the commissioners for the poor and members of the Parlement. They denounced the king's *mignons* as 'the kingdom's real leeches and plagues'.⁵³ On 30 May magistrates threatened to go on strike as their wages had not been paid. When Sixtus V eventually learnt of Henry's decision to march in person against the heretics, he authorized the alienation of church property worth 50,000 *écus*. The clergy again protested but the nuncio, Morosini, and Gondi bishop of Paris managed to placate them. Before the money could be raised, the king had to ask the pope for a loan of 400,000 *écus*. At the same time, he tried to neutralize the Guises. In May he asked his mother to negotiate with them. She met Henri de Guise and cardinal de Bourbon in Rheims and after three weeks of talks, they agreed to extend by one month the truce signed in April with the duc de Bouillon. They flatly refused to hand over the towns of Doullens and Le Crotoy to the duc de Nevers whom the king had appointed as governor of Picardy.⁵⁴ At the end of April, Henry complained of the current situation in a letter to Villeroy. 'But we must not be discouraged,' he wrote, 'If we put up with this disobedience, farewell to all that might remain to me of royalty.' If the towns refused to obey, they would have to face his artillery. He said this with sadness and regret for they were his subjects. His heart was bleeding, but he had to be obeyed.⁵⁵ Early in July, Henry met the duc de Guise at Meaux. He hoped that the duke might avert the threatened invasion of France by Casimir's army by offering the Huguenots a few concessions, but Guise refused any such deal. The king, for his part, said that he was ready to fight the heretics. He also persuaded Guise and Épernon to embrace. On 7 July Guise took leave of the king with a great show of submissiveness, but his real master was elsewhere.⁵⁶ On 12 June he told the Spanish ambassador, Mendoza, of his devotion to Philip II. 'I consider His Catholic Majesty,' he wrote, 'to be the father of all Catholics and of myself in particular'.

⁵³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 296–7.

⁵⁴ *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. La Ferrière and de Puchesse, Vol. 9, p. 219.

⁵⁵ *Lettres de Henri III*, Vol. 7, No. 6979, p. 516.

⁵⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 305; Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 600.

The War of the Three Henrys (1587–89)

John Casimir's army which invaded Lorraine in August 1587 consisted of more than 21,000 troops. They were soon joined by François de Châtillon with a Huguenot force from Languedoc. Navarre wanted them to wait at Roanne until he could join them. Henry III, meanwhile, sent Joyeuse to fight Navarre in the west.⁵⁷ The duke hoped that a victory would help him regain some of the king's favour which he had lost to Épernon. After he had moved into Poitou at the end of July, Navarre withdrew to the safety of La Rochelle as his army was too small to engage the enemy. He also evacuated a number of minor towns. On 15 August Joyeuse returned to Paris whereupon Navarre reconquered Poitou in less than a fortnight.

In August 1587 Henry III called a special council meeting to consider the threat posed by the German invasion. The dukes of Nevers and Épernon were present along with marshals Biron and de Retz and the secretary of state, Villeroy. Henry announced his intention to march at the head of his army. All the councillors, save Nevers, opposed the idea. Nevers argued that the king's presence on the battlefield would disarm the Guises. He argued that the king's best chance of winning over his subjects was for him to appear as their saviour and protector, but this required a victory. Henry now devised a cunning strategy involving the deployment of three armies. He sent Joyeuse at the head of his best troops to fight Navarre in Guyenne. He assumed that the duke would be victorious and that he, Henry, would become a Catholic hero at the expense of the Guises. The latter were given the less glamorous task of harassing the German invaders with inadequate troops. Henry assumed that Guise would fail in his task and lose his popularity, while he himself with the bulk of the army would stop the enemy advance on the Loire. By this strategy Henry hoped to destroy both the Guises and Navarre, but fate was to dictate otherwise.⁵⁸

On 12 September, Henry III left Paris to lead his army. Before doing so, however, he called on the Parlement and captains of the militia to ensure the safety and tranquillity of the capital in his absence. He then said goodbye to his mother and called at Notre-Dame before leaving the capital.⁵⁹ He set up camp at Gien on the River Loire where he hoped to prevent Navarre from joining the German invaders. Joyeuse, meanwhile, resumed military operations in Poitou. What Navarre was planning to do at this moment is unclear. He doubtless

⁵⁷ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 300.

⁵⁸ Constant, *La Ligue*, p. 140.

⁵⁹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 315.

wanted John Casimir's *reiters* to take some pressure off him, but they were reluctant to venture too far into France. They were tired after their long marches, their supplies were running short and they feared the hostility of the French population. When they found Henry established at Gien, they decided to push westward towards Tours along the right bank of the Loire. Navarre, meanwhile, retreated to Guyenne and Joyeuse set off in pursuit. On 20 October the latter attacked. Navarre accepted the challenge. The opposing armies, which were of roughly equal size, faced each other on a plain outside Coutras. The Huguenots were soberly dressed, hardened veterans, whereas Joyeuse's cavalry consisted of inexperienced young men keen to show off their valour. They wore velvet doublets, silk sashes and multicoloured plumes. Before battle was joined, the Huguenots offered up prayers to the Almighty and sang the 118th psalm. Their guns then opened fire, wreaking havoc among Joyeuse's infantry. His cavalry charged only to give way at several points to a counter-charge by Navarre's cavalry. While some of Joyeuse's men fled, others, including the duke himself and his younger brother, Charles, were cut down. The battle lasted only two hours. Afterwards 2,000 royalists lay dead on the field, including 300 noblemen. Huguenot losses were few. Navarre ordered the wounded to be cared for, the dead honoured and many prisoners released without exacting a ransom.⁶⁰ But instead of joining the Germans north of the Loire, Navarre allowed his army to break up while he went to Béarn and laid the Catholic flags captured at Coutras at the feet of his mistress, Corisande d'Andouins. As his future minister, Sully, put it: 'after eight days all the hoped for fruits of so great and signal a victory floated away like smoke on the wind'.⁶¹

The German army, meanwhile, pushed west towards the Beauce, but soon began to fall apart. The *reiters* set off on their own only to be defeated twice by Guise, first at Vimory on 26 October, then at Auneau on 24 November.⁶² The Swiss, for their part, came to terms with Henry III. They agreed to go home in return for four months' pay and supplies and equipment worth 50,000 *écus*. On 8 December the *reiters* surrendered. They, too, agreed to return home in return for cash and under a strong escort led by Épernon. Guise, who had hoped to annihilate them on their passage through Lorraine, felt cheated of the fruits of victory. On 20 December a general procession took place in Paris to thank

⁶⁰ David Buisseret, *Henry IV* (London, 1984), pp. 21–5; L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 318–19; Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, pp. 268–70.

⁶¹ *Les Oeconomies royales de Sully*, ed. David Buisseret and Bernard Barbiche (Paris, 1970), p. 196.

⁶² Constant, *La Ligue*, pp. 140–41.

God for ridding the country of the foreigner. The participants included the two queens and other ladies, members of the Parlement and of the municipality. Three days later, Henry III returned in triumph to the capital. Although he had not fought the Protestants in person, he took the credit for Guise's victories. He attended a *Te Deum* at Notre-Dame, then rode to the Hotel de Ville. Spectators shouted '*Vive le Roy!*' but it was said that they had been bribed to do so.⁶³ The real hero of the hour was the duc de Guise. Without him, the League's preachers declared, 'the ark would have fallen to the Philistines'. L'Estoile was not deceived. In his opinion, Henry realized that it was the League that was being celebrated for its victory at Auneau. His tit for tat was to deny Guise any share in the celebrations by banishing him to his *gouvernement* of Champagne. But the duke settled at Soissons which soon became a nest of plots against the king. Speaking to the English ambassador, Henry revealed the bitterness in his heart: 'If the reiters had shown more valour and skill' he said, 'they would have defeated the League ... I would have given them all the help they needed to succeed. Two or three times they had the means to end everything in a day'.

The Sorbonne, meanwhile, decreed that a ruler who was deemed unsatisfactory by his subjects could be lawfully deposed.⁶⁴ Henry III reacted with fury. On 30 December he summoned members of the Parlement and Sorbonne to the Louvre and in their presence reprimanded a number of preachers and the authors of the offensive decree. They deserved to be punished, he said, yet he did not propose to follow the example of Pope Sixtus V who had sent to the galleys some friars who had spoken ill of him. L'Estoile took this as further proof of Henry's feebleness and timidity.⁶⁵ Henry III could also be extremely foolish. Although he knew that Épernon was extremely unpopular among his Catholic subjects, he gave him the offices previously held by Joyeuse. In November 1587 the duke was appointed governor of Normandy, the most important office of its kind in the kingdom and one normally reserved for a prince of the blood. He also replaced César de Bellegarde, who had also fallen at Coutras, as governor of Angoumois, Aunis and Saintonge. As Pasquier noted: 'without striking a blow, he [the king] had lost more noblemen than at the battle of Coutras ... for to reward one lord in the midst of so many others who were risking their lives in his service was to lose as many hearts and loyalties'.⁶⁶ At the end of 1587 the king ordered the preacher, Brulart, to be imprisoned for attacking Épernon in

⁶³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol 5, p. 329.

⁶⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 328.

⁶⁵ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 5, pp. 330–331 [the king].

⁶⁶ Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, p. 268.

his sermons and in the spring of 1588 a number of pamphlets were published attacking the 'new Gaveston'. The most famous was entitled *Histoire tragique et memorable de Pierre de Gaverston, Gentil-homme Gascon, jadis le mignon d'Édouard 2 Roy d'Angleterre* (The tragic and memorable history of Piers Gaveston, former favourite of Edward II king of England). No less than five editions were published in 1588. Ascribed to Jean Boucher, the work drew an analogy between the disorders caused by Piers Gaveston under Edward II in England and those caused by Épernon in contemporary France. Gaveston's murder in 1312 is presented as an anticipation of the fate awaiting not only Épernon but also Henry III as Edward II was deposed, then assassinated, by rebellious barons. Épernon commissioned a reply to the pamphlet, which in turn produced a reply. This attacked him without concealment behind historical examples. It accused him of squawking like a parrot and of having no other faith than the king's service. He was also charged with securing the greatest favours by witchcraft. Épernon's enemies included not only Leaguers but many courtiers. In 1587 the secretary of state, Villeroy, invited René de Villequier secretly to join the ranks of Épernon's enemies. The favourite was consistently portrayed by the League's propagandists as the ally of the king of Navarre.⁶⁷ One who could not forgive him for a past offence was Pierre d'Épinac, archbishop of Lyons, who now threw in his lot with the League. Henry, who valued his advice, tried to dissuade him, but Épinac's price was Épernon's dismissal which the king would not concede.

⁶⁷ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 660–62.

Chapter 14

Annus Horribilis: 1588

The German mathematician and astronomer, Johann Müller, alias Regiomontanus, writing in the late fifteenth century, prophesied that in 1588 the world would experience a major catastrophe or, at best, huge upheavals. 'Powerful empires will crumble,' he wrote, 'and there will be deep mourning everywhere.' As the year in question approached, numerous almanacs and horoscopes reminded French people of the prophecy. As they looked at the state of their own kingdom, they might well feel that Regiomontanus was about to be proved correct.¹ The military campaign that the king had launched against the Protestants was getting nowhere and Catherine de' Medici's failure to reach a settlement with Henry of Navarre offered the League its best chance so far of imposing its will on the king. The economic situation was also dire. As the price of food in Paris rose sharply, crowds of beggars gathered around the doorways of bourgeois houses. In the countryside, people devoured unripe wheat in the fields. Mortality was high everywhere.

In spite of the many problems besetting him, Henry III started the New Year in festive mood. On 12 February he extended the duration of the Foire Saint-Germain by six days and went there each day to watch his *mignons* and courtiers misbehaving and, at night, to watch young women from all over Paris frolicking. Henry also paid for lavish feasts in various Parisian houses and also for *mascarades* and ballets 'as if there were neither war nor League in France'.² At a ceremony in Notre-Dame cathedral, on 21 February, he conferred on bishop Pierre de Gondi a cardinal's hat recently sent by the pope.³ But a more sombre mood soon took over as Henry had to take leave of his deceased favourite, the duc de Joyeuse. His funeral and that of his younger brother, Saint Sauveur, took place in Paris on 4 March. Their effigies were displayed at Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas in a chamber where the duc d'Anjou's effigy had been displayed in 1584.⁴ Such effigies were not

¹ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1979), pp. 569–73.

² Pierre de L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 6, p. 15.

³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 16.

⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 23

reserved for royalty: one had been used in 1567 for the funeral of the Constable, Anne de Montmorency. The only difference was that Joyeuse's effigy was not wearing court dress, but a penitent's habit. It was exposed for three days and large crowds came to see it. On 6 March, it was seated at a table and served a meal, as at a royal funeral. Next day, Henry and Épernon performed the last rites, and on 8 March the funeral took place in the church of the Grands-Augustins. A huge procession, led by criers carrying bells and small children, escorted the bodies of Joyeuse and his brother from Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas to the Augustins. Also in the procession were members of religious orders, penitents (grey, black and blue), torch-bearing representatives of the parishes, canons, archers, six lackeys, 88 officials of the king's household, his confessors and almoners, the royal bodyguard, the Swiss, two trumpeters, the chariot bearing the coffin pulled by four horses, pages carrying the arms and insignia of an Admiral of France and leading the duke's horses, the clergy of Notre-Dame, rectors, physicians, doctors of the Sorbonne, bishops, two heralds and members of the Parlement. The effigies were placed in the choir and, on 9 March, following a Requiem mass, Guillaume Rose, bishop of Senlis, delivered the elegy. Three days later the bodies were taken to the Capuchins of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré.⁵ A commemorative medal struck in honour of Anne de Joyeuse carried the device: *Victimo pro salvo domino, fit in aethere sidus* (Sacrificed for the king's salvation, now a star in the firmament). A literary campaign in his memory was designed to revive Henry III's standing in public opinion. For Joyeuse had died fighting the Huguenots. Several poets composed verses praising the love that had bound him to the king. Raoul Caillet, who in the duke's lifetime had written a poem comparing the duke with Ajax and other heroes of Antiquity, now wrote another comparing Henry III's grief over his loss to that of Phoebus after the fall of Phaeton.⁶ At the same time, Leaguer pamphlets denounced Épernon for not fighting the Huguenots. Each page of one entitled *Grands faits d'armes du duc d'Espernon contre l'armée des hérétiques* (Great feats of arms of the duke of Épernon against the army of the heretics) contained only one word: *Rien*.

The Day of the Barricades

On 22 April 1588 Poulain, the spy who had infiltrated the inner counsels of the Paris League, informed Henry III of a major plot to seize control of the capital.

⁵ Nicolas Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi* (Seyssel, 2000), pp. 640–41.

⁶ Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, pp. 642–4.

The king responded by tightening up security at the Louvre. He needed to be watchful as Madame de Montpensier, the duc de Guise's sister, plotted to have him kidnapped on his way back from Vincennes. Once captured, he was to be taken to Soissons and handed over to her brother. Parisians would be told that he had been seized by Huguenots. This, it was hoped, would unleash a massacre of royalists by the Leaguers; but Henry was again warned in time by Poulain and the plot collapsed.⁷ Soon afterwards, Poulain warned the king that Guise was about to come to Paris from Soissons. Henry forbade him to do so. As rumours of an uprising grew more threatening, the municipal assembly met on 7 May. A general inspection of houses was decided to find out how many aliens were in the capital and why. Vagabonds were ordered to leave. As an additional precaution, the king ordered 4,000 Swiss troops to move from Lagny to the suburbs of Paris. The Leaguers, for their part, alarmed by some views that had been expressed at the municipal assembly, sent an urgent call for help to Guise. He was afraid of being charged with rebellion if he defied the king's ban but did not wish to stand by and see his supporters in Paris wiped out. A way out of his dilemma was provided by Catherine de' Medici, who invited him to the capital. Épernon had gone to Normandy and Guise was keen to take advantage of his absence.

On 8 May the duke rode to Paris with a small escort and next day called on the queen-mother.⁸ They then called on Henry III at the Louvre. According to an eye-witness, he reprimanded Guise for his disobedience. The duke explained that he had been invited by Catherine who wanted to reconcile him with the king. This explanation apparently satisfied Henry. Pasquier's account of what happened is different. Looking haggard, Henry asked Guise why he had disobeyed his command. The duke offered three explanations: he wanted to do the king humble service, to respond to falsehoods that had been spread about him, and to die alongside his friends whose lives were being threatened by the king. After remaining silent for several minutes, Henry allowed Guise to leave. A huge crowd outside the Louvre greeted him with shouts of 'Long live Guise! Long live the pillar of the church!' A woman asked him to touch her rosary. As he did so, she said that she no longer feared death now that God had allowed her to see Him.⁹ Thus did the duke's triumph assume an almost messianic character.

⁷ Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996), p. 154.

⁸ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 29–30.

⁹ Estienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, ed. D. Thickett (Geneva, 1966), p. 289; Stuart Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers: The Guise family and the making of Europe* (Oxford, 2009), p. 274.

Catherine now exerted herself to reach a settlement. On 10 May she asked Guise to restore some Picard towns that the League had occupied, but he replied that such a concession did not depend on him. The kingdom, he said, needed to be reformed if civil peace was to be restored. Henry III, for his part, allowed his mother a free hand while appearing to be conciliatory. He even invited Épinac, archbishop of Lyons, regarded by some as 'the brains of the League', to see him in Paris. Guise, in the meantime, consolidated his position. On 10 May the king learnt that the duke's Albanian troops were dangerously close to the walls of Paris. On being told that friends and servants of the duke had secretly penetrated the capital, Henry doubled the number of guards outside the Louvre.¹⁰ During the night of 11 May, he brought into Paris a regiment of French and Swiss guards thereby violating the privilege so cherished by the Parisians of being responsible for their own defence. The troops were posted at several key points in the city, including the Place de Grève, the traditional setting for large public demonstrations. Having taken stock of the situation, students and bourgeois gathered in the Place Maubert. The king, instead of trying to disperse them, sent Bellièvre to the Hôtel de Guise to tell the duke that 'he had no evil designs against him'. Catherine asked the duke to quell the unrest, but he explained that he could not do so as the Parisians had risen without his knowledge and he did not command the militia. Only the city magistrates, in his opinion, could restore order. Guise was now advised by friends to leave the capital, but he refused. As the Parisians began erecting barricades across the streets, the duke asked Aumale and Brissac to find out what their intentions were. The barricades consisted of barrels filled with sand or stones, upturned carts, doors and window-shutters and other bulky objects. Such obstacles had never been used before. In the past, chains had been stretched across streets at times of public unrest, but they were not thought to be enough on this occasion. The barricades were intended to contain the rioters within certain areas and to prevent violence and looting. Only persons holding a special permit were allowed to pass through them.¹¹ But the barricades also prevented the royal troops from restoring order. Fearing a massacre, Henry ordered them to fall back near the Louvre. At the same time, he asked marshal Biron to persuade Guise to restore calm to the capital. Eventually, around 4 p.m., the duke left his residence. Wearing a doublet of white satin, he mounted his horse and rode through the streets followed by a large crowd of admirers and set free royal troops which had been trapped in various places. 'But for him,' writes L'Estoile, 'they would all have died as they themselves have since admitted'. As

¹⁰ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 30–31.

¹¹ Denis Richet, *De la Réforme à la Révolution* (Paris, 1991), pp. 53–67.

Parisians shouted *Vive Guise!* and urged the duke to go to Rheims, where kings of France were traditionally crowned, he put on a show of disapproval. Doffing his broad-brimmed hat, he said: 'My friends! That's enough! Messieurs! That is too much! You must shout *Vive le Roi!*'¹² As night fell, fires were lit in the streets. Meanwhile, in the Louvre, the king waited apprehensively, guarded by courtiers with drawn swords and by Swiss and French guards in battle-order. That evening, he sent for a Picard regiment made up of 1,800 veterans.

Anticipating a showdown on 13 May, Guise sent a messenger to Entragues, governor of Orléans, asking him to send reinforcements. The Leaguers planned to storm the Louvre. The duke's lieutenant, Brissac, had gathered a force of some 800 students and 400 monks near the church of Saint-Séverin. They carried an assortment of weapons-swords, daggers, pikes and spits taken from butchers in the *Marché neuf*. Early that morning, Catherine de' Medici arrived at the Louvre with the presidents of the Parlement, the mayor of Paris and the *échevins*. They begged Henry to restore order to the capital. He promised to withdraw his forces from Paris if the barricades were lifted and the rioters surrendered their weapons, but the mayor insisted on the troops being removed unconditionally. Henry gave way and at a council meeting that afternoon a majority of members expressed the fear that the Leaguers would try to capture him. They advised Henry to leave Paris, the only dissenting voice being Catherine's. She believed that she could win over the duc de Guise. 'Yesterday,' she said, 'I did not hear anything said by M. de Guise which suggested that he wanted otherwise than to be reasonable. I will see him presently and I am sure that I will make him end the unrest.' Early that afternoon, the queen-mother was carried in her litter to the Hôtel de Guise. Some barricades had to be removed to let her pass. But Guise received her coldly. It would be as difficult, he said, to quell the Parisian mob as to tame 'bulls on heat'. He refused to call on the king at the Louvre for fear of being handed over to his enemies and submitted three demands to Catherine: first, the application of all existing decrees against the Huguenots and an all-out-war against the king of Navarre; secondly, the banishment of all the king's friends, and thirdly governorships for himself and his family. Realizing the futility of her mission, Catherine sent a message to Henry, advising him to leave Paris; but he had already fled.¹³

On 13 May, in the evening, Henry left the Louvre as surreptitiously as he had left Cracow in 1576. Alone and on foot he went to his stables and mounted his horse. Around 4 p.m. after he had been joined by several friends and ministers,

¹² L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 34–5.

¹³ Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, pp. 581–2.

he passed through the Porte Neuve, the only gate left unguarded by the Leaguers. Four thousand Swiss troops escorted him to Saint-Cloud and beyond. After spending one night at Rambouillet, he arrived in Chartres where he could count on the bishop's support. Catherine, meanwhile, remained in Paris with a few councillors. She continued for several weeks to negotiate with the Leaguers. Villeroy and Miron, the king's physician, travelled to and fro between Chartres and Paris. The Parlement sent a delegation to Chartres to beg the king to return only to be told to perform their duties as normal. From Chartres, Henry wrote to his officials justifying his recent behaviour. He explained that he had never intended to impose foreign troops on the Parisians whose loyalty he trusted and that he had always wanted to found his authority on his subjects' love, not on force. Their uprising, he said, was unforgivable: they had taken up arms regardless of the good treatment they had received from him. He urged his officials not to believe the lies spread by his opponents, but to condemn them.¹⁴

The king's flight completely altered the role of the duc de Guise. No longer a mediator between the king and the rebels, he was now their leader and needed to consolidate his hold on the capital. On 14 May, after the Bastille had surrendered, he appointed Jean Bussy-Leclerc, a zealous Leaguer, as its governor. Next day, the mayor of Paris, Hector de Péreuse, was arrested. Between 18 and 22 May a new municipal administration was appointed by an assembly chaired by Guise. A new mayor, Michel Marteau, sieur de la Chapelle, who was one of the Sixteen, and new *échevins*, all of them leaguers, were elected by a show of hands.¹⁵ Guise also tightened his control of towns around Paris. He wanted its supplies to be maintained. Catherine, meanwhile, tried to reconcile the parties, but Guise was in no hurry to oblige now that he controlled the king's revenues. On 26 June Mendoza reported to Philip II that the duke was master of the situation and that the king would have to treat with him.

Henry III was not helpless, however. Nineteen important towns, most of them south of the Loire, assured him of their loyalty. Given this support, he was unwilling to make all the concessions demanded by the League and his mother. He was willing to dismiss Épernon and his brother, to withdraw his troops from Paris, and to make war on the Protestants, but he refused to recognize the capital's new administration or to appoint Guise as lieutenant-general of the kingdom. He sent counter-proposals to his mother which were rejected before

¹⁴ Nicolas Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu: L'assassinat d'Henri III* (Paris, 2006), p. 128.

¹⁵ Olivia Carpi, *Les guerres de religion (1559–1598) Un conflit franco-français* (Paris, 2012), p. 469.

calling on Villeroy to assist her in further talks. A month later, Henry gave way to Catherine by signing a new Edict of Union in which he confirmed the oath to extirpate heresy which he had sworn at his coronation. He called on all Catholics to promise likewise and not to obey a heretic if he should die childless. Henry also swore not to give any office to a non-Catholic and announced that he was joining the League. The Guises were exonerated for all their treasonable acts, including the events in Paris of 12–13 May. On 4 August Guise was appointed commander-in-chief of all the royal armies and Épernon was dismissed.¹⁶

The Estates General of Blois

Henry III, it seems, viewed the Edict of Union as a temporary setback. He aimed to recover his authority in full with the help of the Estates-General. In his letters summoning them, he undertook, as no previous king had ever done, strictly to carry out their wishes. He knew that his failure to uphold the promises that he had made to them in 1576 had caused lasting resentment. But the future depended on the outcome of the elections to the Estates in the various *bailliages*. Would the deputies support him or the League? Powerful as they were, the Guises drew their strength mainly from certain regions of France, mainly in the east. The majority of nobles did not support them. Many were content to run their estates without becoming embroiled in politics. In Beauce, 4 per cent of nobles fought in Protestant armies, 2 per cent supported the Guises and 14 per cent the king. In Auvergne, two-thirds remained neutral, one-quarter served the king and only one-twelfth the League. Much the same was true of the towns. Support for the League was strongest in the north, while, in the south, towns leaned towards the king. But the outcome of the elections in 1588 did not reflect accurately the state of the parties.¹⁷

As voting got underway, both Henry and Guise put pressure on the electors. Writing to Mendoza, on 5 September, the duke claimed: 'I am not forgetting anything on my side, having sent to all provinces and *bailliages* [trustworthy agents] to secure a contrary outcome'. He predicted: 'the largest number of deputies will be for us'.¹⁸ In Chartres, Henry III secured the election of

¹⁶ N.M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 365–6; André Stegmann, *Édits des guerres de religion* (Paris, 1979), pp. 216–17.

¹⁷ Jean-Marie Constant, *Les Guise* (Paris, 1984), pp. 216–17.

¹⁸ Joseph de Croze, *Les Guises, les Valois et Philippe II* (Paris, 1866), Vol. 2, pp. 358–9.



Figure 14.1 Meeting of the Estates-General at Blois in 1588. Engraving by Nicolas Le Roy and François Gence, Paris. On the left, Henry III is sitting in state flanked by the Guise brothers. In the centre, Henry and the duc de Guise are taking communion from the cardinal. On the right, the murder of the Guise brothers and Henry is dining with the duke before his murder.

Source: Photo RJK.

M. de Maintenon, a royal councillor and a member of his household, against the wishes of the local nobility. Elsewhere, the League was successful. At Troyes, the cardinal de Guise ensured the election of members of his own party, as did Mayenne in Poitou and Burgundy. In Amiens, the duc d'Aumale, Guise's cousin, arrived just as the nobility was settling down to business. At Angers, the seigneur de Boisdauphin, a friend of Guise, was elected by the nobility. Less is known about elections among the clergy. The cardinals of Guise and Bourbon were elected for Rouen and Laon respectively and a majority of deputies followed their lead throughout the meeting of the Estates. Much the same was true of the Third Estate. La Chapelle-Marteau, the new mayor of Paris, chaired the work of

the assembly. 80 per cent of the Third Estate supported the League. Elsewhere, the pattern of voting varied. In Champagne where the League was strong, the townspeople expressed radical views well ahead of their time. The Guises were influential in Champagne, Burgundy, Picardy and in the Rhone valley, but were not successful in every town. While some, like Chaumont, supported them, others, like Langres, did not. In Normandy, Caen opted for the king while Rouen preferred the Guises. The deputies who converged on Blois in 1588 were not prepared to be deceived as they felt they had been in 1576. The election of friends of Guise to the chairmanship of each chamber shows that they meant business. The clergy chose the cardinals de Bourbon and Guise; the nobility, the comte de Brissac, one of the organizers of the Paris barricades, and baron de Magnac; and the Third Estate: La Chapelle-Marteau, the new mayor of Paris.

Henry III arrived in Blois on 1 September accompanied by Catherine de' Medici, Henri de Guise and all the court. A week later, he surprised everyone by dismissing all his ministers: his chancellor, Cheverny, the *surintendant* Bellièvre and the secretaries of state, Villeroy, Pinart and Brûlart.¹⁹ According to Cavriana, the Tuscan envoy, the king wrote to Villeroy as follows: 'Villeroy, I remain very satisfied with your services; but do not fail to go home and to remain there until I have you recalled. Do not seek the reason for my letter; simply obey me.'²⁰ The sacked ministers were replaced by little-known administrators without links to the high nobility. François de Montholon, a former lawyer in the Parlement, became Keeper of the Seals. Known for his integrity, he had seldom been to court and may never have seen the king! Martin Ruzé de Beaulieu and Louis de Revol, two loyal and competent administrators, became secretaries of state and, early in the following year, two more were appointed. François d'O became *surintendant des finances*. The king's action seems to have taken everyone by surprise. What lay behind it? Pasquier made three suggestions: first, the king wanted to get rid of the men Catherine de' Medici had appointed and whom he suspected of pursuing her policies rather than his. Secondly, he wished to show the Estates that a new era was about to begin. Thirdly, he wanted to be avenged on the duc de Guise.²¹ According to Mendoza, Henry explained to his mother that he had sacked his ministers for the following reasons: Cheverny was corrupt, Bellièvre was a Huguenot, Villeroy was vain and wanted to monopolize royal favour, Brulart was a nonentity, and Pinart was a rascal who would sell

¹⁹ N.M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State in the Age of Catherine de Medici* (London, 1962), pp. 284–303.

²⁰ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III, roi shakespeareien* (Paris, 1985), p. 648.

²¹ Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, pp. 330–31.

his parents for money'²² Officially, Henry wanted people to believe that he had sacked his ministers on account of their faults and misdemeanours. Some contemporaries thought he was getting rid of men who had shown sympathy for the king of Navarre. Catherine saw the ministerial reshuffle as marking the end of her influence. Writing to Bellièvre on 20 September, she complained 'of the harm done to me by teaching the king to love his mother and to honour her as God commands, but not to give her enough authority and trust to prevent what one wants to do'.²³ Henry clearly had not forgiven her or his ministers for bringing about his reconciliation with Guise or for advising him to submit to the League's demands. When the nuncio warned him of the enemies he might have created by sacking his ministers, Henry replied, 'I am thirty-seven years old and I want to devote myself wholeheartedly to running my kingdom in my own way and to see if I can achieve better results than by following the advice of those I have dismissed'. He now tried to run the government himself. His former secretaries had had close personal relations with high-ranking nobles; the new ones had hardly any, if that. Henry laid down what he expected of them: they were to be 'good Catholics', men of experience and over 35 years old. They had to take an oath and sign a contract that was kept in a coffer. They were 'to recognize only his said Majesty and to embrace only his wishes and no others' and were not to open any letters in his absence, except in his mother's presence. This marked a complete change from the earlier régime, as described by Villeroy in a letter written after his sacking.²⁴ Henceforth Henry himself opened dispatches, drew up memoranda and supervised the army's mobilization. Letters were henceforth addressed to him personally by-passing his secretaries.²⁵

The opening session of the Estates, scheduled for 15 September, was postponed for a month as not enough deputies had arrived. The king was thus given time to try to win their support; but Guise, who had sent agents to all the provinces, believed that the majority supported him. Even so, he felt that his presence at Blois was needed and handed over command of the army in Poitou to the duc de Nevers. All the leaders of the League joined him in Blois, except Mayenne. Henry put on a show of friendship towards Guise, but observers were not deceived. On 21 September Guise wrote to Mendoza: 'I am being warned

²² Constant, *Les Guise*, p. 215.

²³ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 648.

²⁴ Xavier Le Person, '*Pratiques*' et '*practiqueurs*': *La vie politique à la fin du règne de Henri III (1584–1589)* (Geneva, 2002), pp. 576–7.

²⁵ Nicolas Le Roux, *Les guerres de religion, 1559–1629* (Paris, 2009), p. 259; Edmund H. Dickerman and Anita M. Walker, 'The Language of Blame: Henri III and the Dismissal of His Ministers' in *French History*, 13 (1999), pp. 77–98.

from all sides that my life is in danger. But I have, thank God, gathered a large number of my friends and also bribed some of those most likely to be employed to kill me, that if they dare to try, I will be even more successful than I was in Paris'. Three days later Cavriana reported: 'This court is full of fears and suspicions. A strange and horrible accident is expected, but no one knows what it will be or who will be responsible'.²⁶ In the capital, Leaguers feared for his life. Mendoza wrote to Philip II: 'They have told me themselves that if the king were to take some extreme measure against Mucius (i.e. Guise), they would immediately call Jacobo (Mayenne) and place themselves under the obedience and protection of Your Majesty'.²⁷

Most of the deputies who came to Blois in the autumn of 1588 were the same as those in 1576, only more radical. The Third Estate, which in 1576 had followed the lead given by the clergy and nobility, was now determined to play a more decisive role. They deplored the king's failure to destroy heresy and were determined to defend the Catholic faith. On Sunday 2 October the king, queens, princes and deputies went in procession from the château of Blois to Notre-Dame-des-Aides on the left bank of the Loire and a week later the three orders attended a high mass. Five representatives of each Estate sat on a bench in front of the High Altar. They looked to Guise to defend their faith rather than the king who seemed to them timid, if not hostile. The opening session of the Estates, on 16 October, was essentially ceremonial. All eyes were fixed on Guise, who, as Grand Master, sat below the king. A contemporary remarked that a single look from him towards his supporters 'strengthened their desire to advance his greatness'. Without speaking, he seemed to be saying: 'I can see you'.

The king's opening speech was, as always, eloquent. He began by praising his mother. She deserved, he said, to be called not just 'the king's mother' but 'the mother of the state and kingdom'. After calling on the deputies to put aside their private passions and to reject any party other than his, he warned those nobles who might be tempted to form leagues or associations. Only the king, he said, had the right to levy troops or to raise money in or out of the kingdom. 'Some great nobles in my kingdom,' he said, 'have formed such leagues and associations, but with my customary kindness, I am putting the past behind me regarding this matter. However, as I have to uphold royal dignity, I hereby declare that any subject of mine, who now or in the future will continue to adhere to such leagues and associations without my consent, will be deemed guilty of high treason'. Guise is said to have turned pale as he heard these words. After consulting the

²⁶ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 649.

²⁷ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 650.

archbishop of Lyons, he and his supporters asked Henry to delete the offensive passage from the printed version of his speech and he agreed to do so.²⁸ On 18 October, Henry gave way to another demand of the Leaguers by swearing to observe the Edict of Union, thereby effectively turning it into a 'fundamental law' that raised catholicity above the Salic law in determining the royal succession. After the deputies had taken the same oath, there was much rejoicing in Blois. Henry was escorted by the three orders to the cathedral of Saint-Sauveur for a *Te Deum*. He could hardly believe his ears as the people cheered him. When La Chapelle-Marteau thanked him in the name of Paris, Henry replied that he forgave all that had happened on the Day of the Barricades.

France, in the meantime, came under attack. Charles-Emmanuel, duke of Savoy, seized the marquisate of Saluzzo which was the last French territory in Italy, all the rest having been ceded to the duke's father by Henry in 1574. After occupying Carmagnola on 27 September 1588, the ducal troops seized the rest of the principality under pretext of defending it from attacks by heretics. At the Estates of Blois, the sieur de Maintenon tried unsuccessfully to persuade his fellow nobles to assist the French garrisons beyond the Alps. Henry III, for his part, could not believe that Charles-Emmanuel would have dared to attack France without the League's complicity, but he was wrong: Guise had, in fact, rejected overtures from Charles-Emmanuel. More disagreements now surfaced between the king and the Estates. The clergy were not content with the clause in the Edict of Union debarring any heretical prince from the throne; they wanted the king of Navarre to be formally condemned as a traitor and deprived of his right to the crown along with his posterity. Henry, however, refused to condemn him without giving him the chance to speak in his own defence. He suggested sending an embassy to Navarre 'to remind him of his duty', but the Estates wanted him to be condemned now. The archbishop of Embrun rejected the idea of talking to a heretic, whereupon Henry said wryly that, if the archbishop feared excommunication, the nuncio would surely absolve him. Another bone of contention was the Parlement's refusal to publish the decrees of the Council of Trent. Anxious to please the pope, Henry agreed to set up a commission to look into the matter. On 7 November Morosini reported that Guise had been influential in persuading the Third Estate to back publication of the decrees. This again upset the king.²⁹

As each day passed, Henry became sure that the Estates were out to destroy his authority. They were demanding that unanimous decisions of the three Estates

²⁸ Constant, *La Ligue*, p. 188.

²⁹ Constant, *Les Guise*, pp. 219–20; Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 658.

should be treated as legally binding and were refusing him financial support. His present difficulties, they claimed, were self-inflicted: he only needed to curb his extravagance to balance the books. Henry tried to win over the Third Estate by admitting that he had been careless about money in the past and promising to do better in future. He undertook to reduce his household expenses, but the deputies demanded that taxes be reduced to the level they were at in 1576. La Chapelle-Marteau said that if their demands were not met, they would go home. Henry was forced to seek Guise's help. The duke spoke to Chapelle-Marteau, president of the Third Estate and Bernard its orator, but they would not listen. The deputies also demanded the creation of a new court to judge bankers and councillors suspected of malversation. Henry pretended to give way. Addressing the Third Estate, he spoke of the love he felt for his subjects. 'I grant your demands' he said prompting shouts of '*Vive le Roi!*' but these were premature. The king added 'on condition that you gather the funds needed to keep up my household and to carry on the war!' In the end, the Estates offered him the paltry sum of 120,000 *écus* while insisting that 100,000 should be paid directly to the dukes of Nevers and Mayenne, who commanded the principal royal armies.

In May Henry wrote at the end of a letter to Villeroy the following comment about the Leaguers: 'Once finally wounded, passion turns into fury. Let them not drive me to it'. But Guise and his friends were doing just that. They were pressing him to make war on the heretics, while denying him the means to do so. As each day passed, he felt his authority ebbing away. At the same time, he was being warned that Guise aspired to become Constable and take control of the government and the army. Henry was also told that the cardinal of Guise had boasted that he would hold his head as he was being tonsured to turn him into a monk! In November Henry and Guise quarrelled over a clause in the Edict of Union. The duke claimed that the League had been given Orléans as a 'surety town' whereas Henry said the town was Doullens in Picardy. Once again the king gave way.

The Blois Murders

According to Davila, Henry III decided to eliminate the duc de Guise at a secret meeting of his council on 18 December. Those present were Rambouillet, his brother Mantenon, d'Aumont and d'Ornano. Another meeting took place on the 22 December. Early next day the king and Guise talked for two hours in the

gardens of the château of Blois. The duke complained that his actions were being misinterpreted in spite of all his efforts to win the king's trust. He announced that he was resigning as lieutenant-general. This appeared to confirm Henry's suspicion that Guise wanted to become Constable. Soon afterwards, according to Palma Cayet, the king retired to his *cabinet* and exploded with rage. Next day, however, he had calmed down. He met Guise once more, this time in Catherine de' Medici's chamber. They greeted each other politely and even exchanged sweetmeats. As they parted, Henry said: 'My cousin, there is much business that needs tidying up by the end of the year. Attend the council early tomorrow for this purpose. I shan't be there but you can let me know what has been decided'.³⁰



Figure 14.2 The murder of the duc de Guise. Wood engraving. Henry is on the right directing the assassination from within his cabinet. On the left, he shows the duke's body to his brother, the cardinal. In the centre, the duke's assassination.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

³⁰ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 664.

The assassination of Henri de Guise was meticulously planned. On 9 August Mendoza had written to Philip II: 'The only real danger facing him (Guise) is to be found in the king's cabinet where one is only admitted alone and where this prince (Henry III) can easily arrange for him to be attacked and killed by a dozen or twenty men posted there for this purpose'. Prophetic words, indeed! The duke needed to be separated from his bodyguard. This only happened when he attended the council. He also needed to be separated from his fellow councillors. To understand the king's plan, we need to be familiar with the distribution of rooms in the royal apartment at Blois. This, unfortunately, was radically altered in the seventeenth century. In 1588 the king's bedchamber, which was parallel to the council chamber, was prolonged at one end by a *cabinet neuf*, a garde-robe and an oratory. At the other end, there was a *cabinet vieux*. Three doors led from the council chamber to the *cabinet vieux*, to the king's bedchamber and to the *cabinet neuf*. Henry had two of them sealed, leaving open only the one leading to his bedchamber. Other traps were also laid for the duke. By announcing that he would be leaving early in the morning for La Noue, a place outside Blois, the king gave himself an excuse for retaining the keys of the château which normally were handed over each evening to Guise as Grand Master. The king also ordered the doors of the château to be shut as soon as the council was in session. His guards, under their captain, Larchant, were ordered to occupy the spiral staircase, leading from the château's courtyard to the council chamber, by 9 p.m. on 22 December. They were to allay suspicion by saying that they were there to petition councillors about their pay. The Forty-five were ordered to occupy the *galerie des Cerfs* early on 23 December.

Henri de Guise was repeatedly warned of the threat to his life. According to Mendoza, Bassompierre and Maineville begged him on 20 December to leave Blois, but he refused. Next day, the nuncio, Morosini, also urged him to leave, but again he would not listen. On the 22 December the duke's mother begged him to take care, as she had been reliably informed that he would be killed the next day. He replied: 'Mother, I cannot believe this of the king after all that he has promised me and said to me or that he could have such a project in his heart'. Between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. Elbeuf, the duke's cousin, warned him of the threat to his life, and early on 23 December, Guise received no less than five anonymous notes to the same effect. Turning to his surgeon, he said: 'I would never get anything done if I listened to all these warnings; he would not dare! Let us sleep and go you to bed'. Historians have often been astonished by the

duke's insouciance, but it seems that he could not believe that the king would be mad enough to have him killed.³¹

On 23 December Henry III was awakened at 4 a.m. He promptly joined Bellegarde, and Du Halde in the *cabinet neuf* along with others privy to his plan. An hour later, he inspected the Forty-five in the *Galerie des Cerfs* and picked a number to join him in his chamber. He then attended mass in his oratory. At 7 a.m. he sent Aumont, Rambouillet, Maintenon and O to the council chamber. Eight of the Forty-five with Laugnac joined the king in his chamber. Twelve were posted in the *cabinet vieux* and others elsewhere in the château. Guise, in the meantime, was roused by his valet who was alarmed by noise in the courtyard, but the duke reassured him. The noise, he explained, was caused by horses and coaches being prepared for the king's early departure for La Noue. Guise went back to sleep till 6 a.m. when he got up, dressed and set off on foot and in pouring rain for the château. After trying in vain to see the queen-mother, he went to the chapel only to find it locked. On his way to the council chamber, he brushed aside two noblemen who tried to dissuade him from going any further. He called one of them a 'fool'. He then climbed the spiral staircase leading to the council chamber. The other councillors were already there as Guise entered. As they waited for the secretary of state, Ruzé, to present the agenda, the duke asked his secretary, Péricard, to fetch him some raisins. Saint-Prix, the king's valet, offered him prunes in a silver dish. The duke then complained of the cold and asked for more logs to be put on the fire. His nose started to bleed and Saint-Prix left the chamber to fetch him a handkerchief. By now Ruzé-Beaulieu had arrived and the councillors were able to get down to business. Soon afterwards Revol entered the chamber and whispered in Guise's ear that the king wished to see him. Wrapping a cape around his left arm and still holding a handkerchief and the silver dish in his right hand, the duke rose from his seat and knocked on the door of the king's bedchamber. As it closed behind him, the councillors heard a great commotion. They heard the duke shout: '*Ha! Messieurs!*' (*Ah! Gentlemen!*), then '*Ô! quelle trahison!*' (Oh! What treachery!) and '*Mon Dieu, miséricorde!*' (My God! Have pity!).

Many accounts exist of the duke's assassination. The Forty-five armed with daggers and swords were waiting for him as he entered the king's chamber. They saluted him and followed him as he made his way towards the *cabinet vieux* where he expected to find the king. Then, as he turned round for some reason, they fell upon him with drawn swords and ran him through. He tried to fight them off, but the odds were heavily stacked against him. Bleeding from multiple

³¹ Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers*, p. 290.

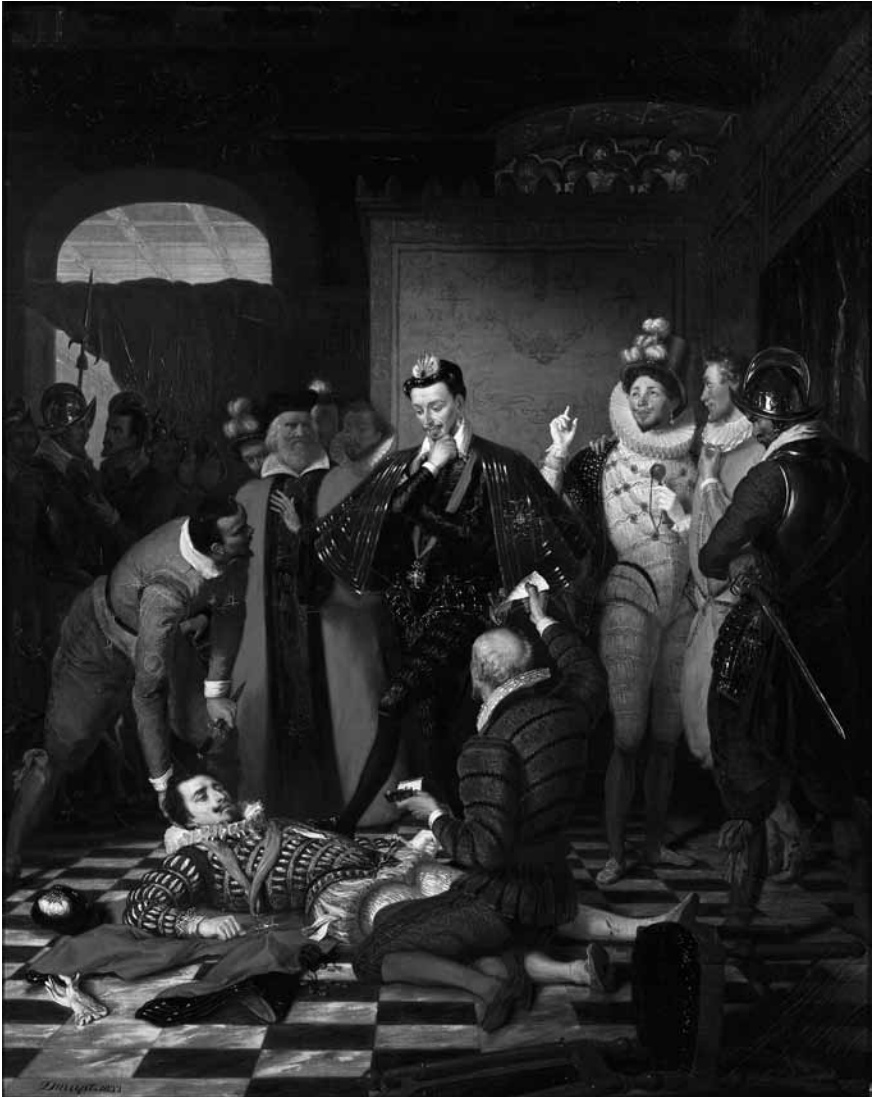


Figure 14.3 The murder of Henri, third duc de Guise in Henry III's apartment at the château of Blois on 23 December 1588. Painting by Charles-Barthélemy Jean Durupt (1804-38) Château de Blois.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

wounds, he collapsed at the foot of the king's bed. The duke was still breathing as Henry stepped out of the *cabinet neuf* to survey the scene. He ordered Guise to be finished off. Meanwhile, chaos had broken out in the council chamber. Hearing his brother's cries, the cardinal of Guise got up precipitately, knocking over his chair. Four councillors restrained him. The king, they said, had to be obeyed. The cardinal threw himself into the arms of an officer of the Scottish guard pleading for his life. He was then arrested and interrogated all day about the League and its plans. The cardinal admitted that the duc de Nevers and other Catholic nobles were planning to capture the king. A document found on Guise's body suggested that he was planning a *coup d'état*. In it he was advised to draw as close as possible to the queen-mother and to flatter the current royal favourites, Bellegarde and Laugnac. The king listened attentively as the document was read to him twice.³²

In the meantime, other developments were taking place at the town hall of Blois. The deputies of the Third Estate were in session when suddenly the *grand prévôt*, Richelieu, burst in with some soldiers. On the pretext that an attempt had been made to kill the king, he arrested a number of deputies, including La Chapelle-Marteau, who was in the chair. They were taken to the king's bedchamber, shown pools of blood on the floor, and heard the order being given for gallows to be erected. But Henry only wanted to scare them. They were then locked up in a room within the château. The fates of the cardinal of Guise and archbishop of Lyons, who were imprisoned in a tower, had yet to be decided. Henry was persuaded to pardon the archbishop, but he was determined that the cardinal should share his brother's fate. Only one of the Forty-Five agreed to carry out this deed. He was helped by six soldiers who were each paid 200 *livres*. The execution was carried out early on 24 December. It is widely believed said that the bodies of the duke and cardinal were burnt in order to rob the League of ever treating them as martyrs. But Cavriana asserts that they 'were buried without any funeral honours in a village lost and seemingly separate from the world which very few people know'.³³

What lay behind Henry III's extraordinary decision to rid himself of the duc de Guise? There were doubtless many reasons, but the attitude of the deputies of the Third Estate at Blois must have been paramount. Since his arrival there, Henry had become increasingly angry. Instead of returning the goodwill which he had shown them from the start, they had shown him only mistrust. They had obliged him to renew the oath he had taken to observe the Edict of Union

³² Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 670–71.

³³ Chevallier, *Henri III*, p. 673.

as though his word was not to be trusted. They had also demanded that Henry of Navarre should be excluded from the order of succession thereby calling into question the Salic law. The last straw may have been their demand that a subsidy they had granted him should be paid instead to the duc de Mayenne. The duc de Guise, moreover, had not given Henry the support he had asked for to obtain an extraordinary subsidy that would enable him to fight an all-out war against the Huguenots. The deputies' mistrust reflecting on Henry's regal authority had driven him to take a violent step designed 'to provoke stupor and to rout those who had flouted his legitimate authority'.³⁴

Soon after the duke's death, Henry called on his mother whose bedchamber was situated immediately beneath his. She was in bed and her physician, Filippo Cavriana, was at her bedside. According to his testimony, the king spoke to his mother as follows:

Good morning, Madam! Please forgive me. Monsieur de Guise is dead and will not be spoken of again. I have had him killed. I have prevented him from doing what he planned to do to me. I could no longer endure his insolence although I did try to put up with it in order not to soil my hands with his blood. I had forgotten the offence given to me on Friday 13 May, the day I was forced to flee from Paris. I had also forgotten his attempt to rob me of my life, my honour and my kingdom. But, as I knew and had continual proofs that he was again undermining and threatening my authority, my life and my state, I decided to take this step after much soul-searching as to whether or not I should do it. My patience was only bringing me shame and harm, and each day I was being irritated and offended until God came to my rescue and finally inspired and helped me. I shall shortly go to church to thank Him during the sacrifice of the mass. Whoever will speak to me in future of the League will receive from me the same treatment as Monsieur de Guise. I want to relieve my people and to hold the Estates, but I want them to speak as subjects, not as kings, as they have been doing till now. I mean no harm to the family of Guise or to its property. I will assist and favour the dukes of Lorraine, Nemours and Elbeuf, as well as Madame de Nemours whom I know to be loyal and well-intentioned towards me; but I wish to be king, not a prisoner or a slave as I have been since 13 May. Now I am once more becoming king and master.

After describing the measures taken in respect of members of the house of Guise and of the cardinal of Bourbon, Henry concluded: 'I will continue to fight

³⁴ Le Person, *'Pratiques' et 'practiqueurs'*, pp. 570–72.

the Huguenots with more zeal and courage for I want by all means to extirpate them from my kingdom. Cavriana has not given us Catherine's reply.

According to the Venetian, Mocenigo, she said: 'My son, that pleases me as long as it is for the good of the state'. She then added with a sigh: 'that at least is my ardent wish'. Catherine may have expressed her true feelings on 25 December when she confided to the Capuchin, Bernard d'Osimo: 'Oh! wretched man! What has he done? Pray for him for he needs [your prayers] more than ever. I see him rushing towards his ruin. I fear that he may lose his body, soul and kingdom!'³⁵ Six days later, Cavriana reported that Catherine was much distressed. Despite her prudence and vast experience of government, she did not know how the kingdom's troubles might be cured either now or in the future.³⁶

On 1 January 1589 Catherine called on her old friend, Cardinal de Bourbon, who was under house arrest. She wanted to tell him that Henry forgave him and that he would soon be set free, but he rounded on her, exclaiming: 'Your words, Madam, have led us all to this butchery'. Silently and weeping, Catherine returned to her apartment. Three days later, she ran a high fever and, on 5 January, she asked to make her will and for her confessor. Her speech became so weak that Henry had to dictate her last wishes. She died, probably of pleurisy, at 1.30 p.m. after taking communion.³⁷ Following an autopsy, Catherine's body was embalmed and placed in a wooden coffin lined with lead. Her effigy, decked out in robes that had served for the funeral of Anne of Brittany, was laid out for public view. On 4 February her funeral took place at the church of Saint-Sauveur in Blois. Renaud de Beaune, archbishop of Bourges, gave the eulogy. He described Catherine as 'the most virtuous queen, the noblest of race and generation, the most excellent in honour, the most chaste among all women, the most prudent in government, the sweetest in conversation, the most affable and kindly, to all who wished to see her, the most humble and charitable to her children, the most obedient to her husband, but above all the most devout before God, and the most affectionate to the poor of any queen who ever reigned in France'.³⁸ In Paris, news of Catherine's death aroused mixed feelings. L'Estoile wrote: 'She was seventy-one years old and well-preserved for such a fat woman. She ate heartily and was not afraid of work although she had to face as much as

³⁵ Chevallier, *Henri III*, pp. 671–2.

³⁶ *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane*, ed. Abel Desjardins (Paris, 1865–72), Vol. 4, pp. 842–3.

³⁷ J.-H. Marièjol, *Catherine de Médicis (1519–89)* (Paris, 1920), pp. 405–6; Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, pp. 599–600.

³⁸ *Oraison funèbre aux obsèques de la Roynne-Mère du Roy* (Blois, 1589); Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, pp. 601–2.

any queen in the world since the death of her husband thirty years before. She died leaving a debt of 800,000 *écus*, having been more prodigal than any prince or princess in Christendom ... She was mourned by some of her servants and intimates and a little by her son the king ... Those closest to her believed that her life had been shortened by displeasure over her son's deed. This was due not so much to her friendship for the two princes of the house of Lorraine (whom she liked in the Florentine way – that is to say, in order to make use of them) but because she could see that it would benefit the king of Navarre, her son-in-law, whose ruin she had sworn to bring about by any means. His succession was what she feared most in the world. Parisians, however, believed that she had given her consent to the murder of the Guises, and the Sixteen said that if her body were brought to Paris for burial at Saint-Denis in the magnificent sepulchre she had built for herself and her late husband, Henry, they would drag it through the streets or throw it in the river. So much for the Parisian view. In Blois, where she had been adored and revered as the court's Juno, she had no sooner passed away than she was treated with as much consideration as a dead goat.³⁹ Catherine's body remained in Blois until it could be transported safely to Saint-Denis, the traditional resting place of France's kings and queens. But, according to Pasquier, the corpse began to smell and had to be buried at night in an unmarked grave in the church of Saint-Sauveur where it remained for 21 years until Diane, the natural daughter of Henry II, had it moved to the Valois rotunda at Saint-Denis.⁴⁰

As early as 24 December Henry sent a note to Morosini, the papal legate, asking him to see him the next day. At their meeting, Henry sought to justify the assassination of the duc de Guise and his brother, the cardinal. He explained that the duke had opposed all his proposals to the Estates and had turned the people against his authority. He had even tried to win over his guards. The king then said that he would have preferred to punish these offences by the normal judicial process, but the Guises had built up so much support in the kingdom and even at court that this would have been impossible. Morosini expressed his horror over the king's action calling it 'a very grave error'. The king, he said, had incurred the censures laid down in the bull *In Cena Domini* for killing an ecclesiastic and urged him to seek absolution from the pope. Henry replied that kings of France had the privilege of exemption from excommunication. Morosini, as papal legate, might have excommunicated him there and then, but did not do so for fear of driving him into the arms of the Protestants. He preferred to let the pope decide. Henry, for his part, invoked a papal brief of 20 July 1587 that allowed a

³⁹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 130–31.

⁴⁰ Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, pp. 386–7.

confessor of his own choice to absolve him of any sin, even the most serious. He did, in fact, confess to the *theologal* of Blois on the morning after the cardinal's murder and was absolved by him. He took communion on 1 January 1589 at a mass celebrating the feast of the Order of the Holy Spirit. Henry sent a copy of the brief to his ambassador in Rome and to cardinal de Joyeuse so that they might remind the pope of its content; but Sixtus V remonstrated that the privilege only applied to sins committed before the brief had been issued.

Although Henry announced that he would continue to honour the Edict of Union and was determined to destroy heresy, he failed to win over the Third Estate which continued to obstruct him at every turn. The clergy and nobility were more reasonable, but it seemed unlikely that any good would now come out of the Estates. They were accordingly wound up on 15 and 16 January 1589 and the deputies returned to their provinces, leaving Henry III to face the fury of the League.

Even in the aftermath of the tragic events at Blois, Henry continued to think of rebuilding his authority. He believed that this could best be achieved by reforming the law. He commissioned Jacques de La Guesle, the *procureur-général* in the Parlement to draft a major new ordinance which received his closest attention. At the end of January 1589 articles concerning the clergy, hospitals, universities and the nobility were complete, but the text of the ordinance was never completed. Henry also tried to make his administration more efficient. He redefined the duties of his secretaries of state. Revol continued to deal with foreign correspondence, while Ruzé attended to war in addition to being responsible for the households of the king and queen. Henceforth Ruzé was to deal only with Paris, the Ile-de-France and Berry. The rest of the kingdom was shared by two new secretaries of state: Louis Potier, sieur de Gesvres, and Pierre Forget, sieur de Presnes. Both hailed from Touraine henceforth to become a royalist bastion. On taking up their duties, the new ministers had to swear obedience to the king. They were not to send out letters without his express permission, to keep his affairs secret and to accept no pensions or gifts from any other princes. At the same time, Henry took steps to improve his personal security. He no longer trusted his ordinary guards and dismissed Laugnac, the chief of the Forty-five. Eight noblemen were now chosen by the king to accompany him at all times. A team of four was to serve every other day. They were to remain alongside the king in order to receive his orders, even during meals, and were given accommodation as close as possible to his chamber. Each was given five horses and two pistols. They were paid 2,000 *écus per annum*. As in the case of the secretaries, they swore only to serve the king and to maintain

secrecy in respect of anything he might say. They were to be his eyes and ears in addition to shielding him. They were to report anything that touched his life, person, authority, estate or honour and to prevent anything that might injure the same. Roger de Bellegarde was appointed their leader with the title of *Grand écuyer de France*. Henry also tried to win over a number of great noblemen. He offered the duc de Nevers the governorship of Champagne and Brie, formerly held by the duc de Guise. The duke accepted the office on condition that the title was officially given to his son. The governorship of Picardy, previously held by Nevers, was given to his son-in-law, the duc de Longueville.

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Chapter 15

Paris in Revolt

Parisians were stunned when they heard of the events in Blois. In the words of the chronicler, L'Estoile: 'News of these murders and imprisonments which reached Paris on Saturday 24 December, Christmas Eve ... greatly upset the town and the people who, taking up arms immediately, began to stand guard day and night. The Sixteen unfurled their old banners and shouted: "murder! fire! blood! revenge!" Everyone said that it was necessary to spend the last *denier* in one's purse and the last drop of one's blood to be avenged on the tyrant (the name given to him (Henry III) in Paris as from now) for the deaths of those good princes of Lorraine'.¹ Preachers called on the people to fight the man who was no longer their king, but the Devil incarnate. Jean Boucher, one of the most fanatical, described Henry as possessing 'the head of a Turk, the body of a German, the hands of a Harpy, the Garter of an Englishman, the feet of a Pole and the soul of a devil!'² Another preacher, Gincestre called him a 'wicked Herod' (*'vilain Hérode'* – the anagram of Henri de Valois) and declared that he was no longer king on account of the crimes he had committed against defenders of the Catholic faith. The people, he said, did not owe him obedience and he asked his audience to indicate by a show of hands their determination to avenge the deaths of the Guise princes. Sitting in the front row was Achille de Harlay, First President of the Parlement. 'Lift up your hand, *Monsieur le Président*,' Gincestre called out 'lift it higher and higher still, if you please, so that the people can see it!'³ As members of the congregation left the church, they tore down the king's arms adorning the porch, threw them in the gutter and trampled on them. According to L'Estoile, Pierre Versoris, a distinguished lawyer who had chaired the Third Estate in 1576, died of shock when told of the Blois murders. The Guises were now identified with good and Henry III with evil. The Leaguers set about destroying all objects that reminded them of him. On 2 January 1589 a mob destroyed the tombs of the *mignons* – Saint-Mégrin,

¹ *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 6, p. 90.

² L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 141.

³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 129

Caylus and Maugiron – in the church of Saint-Paul. Their rightful resting place, they said, was a gibbet, not a church.



Figure 15.1 Henry standing over the bodies of the Guise brothers. Engraving from a contemporary Parisian pamphlet. Henry III is shown ignoring the pleas of their mother, the duchesse de Nemours. On the left, a fire is being prepared to burn the bodies and, on the right, Leaguer princes are being taken to prison.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Hatred of the king was fuelled by an avalanche of pamphlets.⁴ No less than 237 were printed in Paris during the first six months of 1589. According to L'Estoile, the duchesse de Montpensier was mainly responsible for orchestrating this campaign. Never before had a king of France been subjected to vilification on such a scale. A particularly influential pamphlet was *La Vie et faits notables de Henri de Valois* (The Life and Notable Deeds of Henry of Valois), attributed to Jean Boucher. Its impact was enhanced by eight illustrations of the king's

⁴ Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525–vers 1610* (Seyssel, 1990), Vol. 2, pp. 186–96; Denis Pallier, *Recherches sur l'imprimerie à Paris pendant la Ligue (1585–1594)* (Geneva, 1975), pp. 68–9.

alleged misdeeds. Called only 'Henry de Valois', he was accused of having always protected heretics, denied credit for the military victories of his youth and charged with sending Catholic captains to their death during the siege of La Rochelle. The pamphlet also argued that Henry had revealed his hypocrisy by fleeing from Poland in disguise, an action that anticipated his flight from Paris after the Day of the Barricades. Along with his debauched *mignons*, he had been as profligate as the Turkish sultan. God had denied him the power of healing the sick and the fact that the crown had almost slipped from his head twice during his coronation proved his unworthiness. In addition to being accused of dabbling in magic, Henry was charged with unmentionable vices and identified with tyrants of Antiquity, such as Caligula, Nero or Heliogabalus. Yet, believing that only God was authorized to kill a tyrant, the pamphlet did not call for regicide.⁵ It was prepared to let Henry retire after acknowledging his sins while looking forward to the rule of a regent who would prove to be a 'better custodian of his subjects' wellbeing'. Henry III's penitential excesses were interpreted as 'black masses' by the League's propagandists. One pamphlet, entitled *The sorceries of Henri de Valois and the oblations which he made to the devil in the wood at Vincennes*, drew attention to two silver gilt satyrs found at Vincennes. Each held a club in one hand and a crystal vase in the other. Some people said they were used as candlesticks, but the Leaguers argued that the vases contained drugs for use as oblations. The author of the pamphlet took them as proof of devil-worship. L'Estoile tells us that, as Gincestre was preaching on Ash Wednesday 1589, he produced from his sleeve a candlestick on which satyrs were engraved. They were, he said, 'the king's demons which this miserable tyrant ... adored as his gods and used in his incantations'.⁶

The religious fervour that sustained the pamphleteering owed much to the Parisian clergy. In addition to the parish priests who ranted from their pulpits, there were monks and friars belonging to various orders Henry had encouraged, such as the Capuchin friars who had settled in France in 1574. Their house in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré lay close to the palace of the Tuileries. Having taken the vow of poverty, the friars walked barefoot, never changing their habit. Their spectacular displays of piety were much admired at court, notably by the comte de Bouchage, who gave up his office of *Maître de la garde-robe* (Master of the Wardrobe), to enter the order under the name of Frère Ange. The *Feuillants*, a

⁵ Nicolas Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu: L'assassinat d'Henri III* (Paris, 2006), pp. 175–6.

⁶ Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1988), pp. 170–71; L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 146.

branch of the Cistercian order which had also enjoyed royal patronage, became enthusiastic Leaguers. Henry III had been so impressed by the work of Jean de La Barrière, abbot of Labastide-Clermont, near Toulouse, that he had introduced the order to the forest of Vincennes in 1587 and given them an oratory in Paris. After the Day of Barricades, La Barrière returned to Languedoc. He remained loyal to the king, but Bernard de Montgaillard, another *Feuillant*, noted for his eloquence, denounced Henry as the most impious, deceitful and cruel of men. On 5 June 1589 the king wrote to him, reproving his ingratitude. He reminded him that kings were God's earthly representatives: to resist them was tantamount to resisting God. He added that he had no intention of becoming a monk: 'I am the king anointed and consecrated by God,' he declared, 'and I will die, God willing, holding my sceptre'

On 1 January 1589 a campaign of mourning for the Blois victims was launched at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Ardents, one of the holiest sanctuaries in the capital. Collective prayers were organized as well as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in front of a painting that depicted the Blois murders. Fifty-five days of mourning were extended to all the capital's churches, culminating in a memorial service at Notre-Dame on 27 January. The arms of the Guises adorned the cathedral which otherwise was draped only in black. A huge crowd gathered outside the church of Saint-Jean-de-Grève on 7 February for the baptism of Henri de Guise's posthumous son who was credited with miraculous powers. His hands were said to be clasped in prayer whenever his swaddling clothes were removed.⁷ On 12 February, the dukes of Mayenne, Nemours and Aumale were received by the chapter as people outside shouted: 'Long live the catholic princes!' Never had the Guises been more popular.

While they were hailed as Christian martyrs, wax images of the king were being transfixed with pins during Lenten masses. His portrait at the church of the Cordeliers was beheaded and another at the Jacobins rubbed out. On 25 February a large painting in the Augustinian church commemorating Henry's founding of the Order of the Holy Spirit was burned and replaced later by another of Christ among the pilgrims at Emmaus. While the arms of France in the homes of royal servants were destroyed, portraits of the Guises appeared in various sanctuaries. In the church of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Ardents on the Ile-de-la-Cité a picture draped in black depicted the Blois murders.⁸ The double cross of the house of Lorraine was embroidered on the standards and doublets of

⁷ Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996), pp. 215–17; L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 144.

⁸ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 160–63.

soldiers. The historian, Denis Crouzet, has argued that that the League was bent on eradicating Henry III's temporal reign in anticipation of Christ's glorious return at the end of time.⁹ As each day passed, Paris saw itself as the celestial Jerusalem of the Apocalypse. While the king was portrayed as Satan, the city sought to purify itself by anticipating his demise. The Parisian church as a whole seemed committed to resisting his tyranny. Even René Benoît, the *curé* of Saint-Eustache, who was no friend of the League, condemned the Blois massacre as a Satanic act. The struggle between the League and Henry III was seen in Paris as a fight between good and evil. On Ash Wednesday, Gincestre chose as the theme of his sermon 'the life, works and abominable deeds of the perfidious Henry of Valois'. At the same time the Sorbonne formally released the people from their oath of loyalty to Henry and ordered his name to be removed from the canon of the mass.¹⁰

As from the end of January an extraordinary cycle of processions took place in Paris. As L'Estoile reports: 'At the end of this month little children ... began to take part in processions and public prayers. Large groups went from church to church, marching in pairs, holding wax candles and singing litanies, the seven penitential psalms and other psalms, hymns, orisons and prayers composed by their parish priests. Similar processions and prayers were organized by the Parlement and other courts; also by the clergy, including mendicants and other orders. Processions of worshippers from all the Parisian parishes followed. Both sexes, all ages and all social ranks took part. Walking in pairs, most of them wearing only a shirt and barefoot (in spite of the intense cold), they sang devoutly and held wax candles'.¹¹ The processions were intended to placate God's wrath. The Blois murders had been followed by strange happenings in the heavens. Two large nebulae with flashes of light seen over Paris were followed on 13 January by a crescent and a star or comet. Parisians were reminded of the portents that had preceded the fall of Jerusalem which, they believed, would herald the end of the world and the Last Judgment. On 14 February, Shrove Tuesday, the usual public *mascarades* were replaced by more processions. Six hundred schoolchildren walked barefoot, wearing only a shirt and holding candles. Two days later, it was turn of captains of the militia, their lieutenants and standard-bearers. Ahead of them walked clergy bearing relics and torches decorated with the arms of the Guises, and behind them the duc d'Aumale and the duchesse de Montpensier. The processional fervour became so delirious that

⁹ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu*, Vol. 2, pp. 361–424.

¹⁰ Constant, *La Ligue*, pp. 217–18.

¹¹ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 141–2.

the church tried to bring it under control: it tried to restrict processions to the afternoon, so that morning could be devoted to church attendance and prayers. The Franciscans and Dominicans (known as Jacobins because their house was in the rue Saint-Jacques) also backed the League.¹²

Processions were not the League's only response to the Blois murders. It also set about humiliating the people who had exercised power under Henry III. Among them were the presidents and councillors of the Parlement. On 16 January Bussy-Leclerc, who had been a minor official of the court but was now a captain in the militia and governor of the Bastille, burst into the *Grand' Chambre* with about 30 men. He read out the names of certain magistrates and ordered them to follow him: 'you, so and so (he named them), follow me. Come to the Hôtel de Ville where you will be told something'. The other magistrates, however, decided to join them. Parisians were then treated to the extraordinary sight of Bussy-Leclerc leading 50 or 60 magistrates through the streets to the Bastille. L'Estoile was appalled. The object of this 'muster' or 'triumph', as he called it, was not so much to purge the Parlement as to ensure its future compliance with the League's wishes.¹³ For Pasquier, the event marked 'the end of the State'. Henry of Navarre denounced it as an 'act of brigandage'.¹⁴ Most of the magistrates were set free after swearing to defend the Catholic faith, to obey the League and to avenge the deaths of the Guises. Some, however, were removed from their posts. Achille de Harlay was replaced as First President by Barnabé Brisson, a brilliant jurist. No one knew for certain where his political sympathies lay but Parisians assumed that he supported the League.¹⁵

The new Parlement was, of course, unacceptable to Henry III. On 24 March 1589 he ordered the court to move to Tours.¹⁶ Brisson and 43 of his colleagues were charged with felony for refusing to obey. The judges of the Châtelet were also replaced. But if the Leaguers packed some important public bodies with their own men, they could do nothing about the king's council which was beyond their reach. They tried to get round this difficulty by setting up councils of their own which have been described as 'the foundations of a republican League'. Before the Day of the Barricades, the League had a secret council headed by a treasurer who liaised with the Catholic princes. Now, two new bodies were set up: a council of Forty and a council of nine in each of the

¹² Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 177–81.

¹³ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 133–5.

¹⁴ Sylvie Daubresse, *Le Parlement de Paris ou la voix de la raison (1559–1589)* (Geneva, 2005), pp. 447–8.

¹⁵ Daubresse, *Le Parlement de Paris*, p. 449.

¹⁶ Daubresse, *Le Parlement de Paris*, p. 455; L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 156.

sixteen districts of Paris. The first was intended to work ‘with’ rather than ‘under’ the princes, its main task being to dispense justice and provide the means to pursue the war. A list of members, drawn up by Pierre Senault, was submitted to the duc de Mayenne’s approval. The Forty included three bishops, one canon, five *curés*, five senior noblemen, eight members of sovereign courts, five high-ranking office-holders, lawyers and merchants. The chairman was Mayenne, brother of the late duc de Guise, who had been in Lyons at the time of the Blois murders. Though lacking his brother’s charisma, Parisians liked him. The council of nine in each district of Paris was intended to serve as a court of first instance. Each had an official, called ‘*un seize*’ who reported to the council of Forty.¹⁷ The government of Paris was also reorganized. On 26 December the duc d’Aumale was proclaimed as governor.

On 5 January the Sixteen called on the duc de Nevers to support of the League. Paris, they claimed, needed to be defended at all cost as the seat of faith and piety for the whole kingdom, but the duke only replied on 28 January.¹⁸ While assuring the Sixteen of his friendliness, he explained that having only just returned from Poitou, he needed time to consider their demand. He conceded that the Blois murders were a major blow to Catholics, but could not understand why the Parisians were so concerned about their security as Henry III was firmly committed to extirpating heresy from his kingdom. Nevers felt sure that, if all Catholics banded together, there would be no heretics left in the kingdom within two years. He advised the Parisians to set aside their private concerns and devote themselves to God’s glorification. He suggested that recent Catholic setbacks – the fall of Niort, the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the battle of Coutras – were punishments for their divisions. By rising against their lawful sovereign, Nevers warned, they would plunge the kingdom into a disaster comparable to the fall of the Byzantine empire. France would lapse into anarchy in which the people would fight each other like rats in straw.¹⁹ Disappointed by this reply, the Parisians on 21 February again asked Nevers to quit ‘the society of God’s enemies’. They warned him that his honour would be stained if he continued to serve Henry III, but the duke still refused to come to Paris.²⁰

The Parisians were more successful in winning the support of the dukes of Mayenne and Nemours and of the duchesses of Guise, Montpensier and Nemours. They formed what Nevers called ‘the party of revenge’. The most

¹⁷ Constant, *La Ligue*, p. 235.

¹⁸ BnF, ms.fr. 3977, fol. 17.

¹⁹ BnF, ms.fr. 3977, fol. 43v.

²⁰ BnF, ms.fr. 3977, fol. 81.

fanatical was Catherine de Clèves, duchesse de Guise, who wrote many letters describing Henry III as a depraved monster who enjoyed killing his subjects. After giving birth to a son by her late husband, she asked the Parlement to set up a formal enquiry into his death. She looked to Nevers to avenge him. She wrote: 'I hope that God will soon avenge this wickedness which is so cruel and detestable that it cannot be measured exactly ... I am so wretched and miserable that I no longer wish to live apart from the one who was dearer to me than my soul. May it please God to pity me.'²¹ Guise's sister, the duchesse de Montpensier, went about the streets with her young children urging the people to rebel. A pamphlet praised her as the avenging spirit who would exact retribution for her brothers' murder. She was identified with Judith who had liberated Bethulia by beheading the Assyrian general, Holofernes.

Mayenne, Guise's brother, was in Lyons supervising military preparations for an offensive against the Huguenots at the time of the Blois murders. On learning that the king also wanted him killed, he promptly returned to the headquarters of his *gouvernement* of Burgundy at Dijon, and took steps to secure the loyalty of the inhabitants. He sent an agent to Switzerland to raise 6,000 troops and authorized troop levies in Burgundy and Champagne. As the new head of the Guise family, Mayenne was in duty bound to avenge his brothers. He was a violent man by nature. In 1578 his men had beaten up the king's *mignon*, Saint-Mégrin, and in 1587 he had with his own hands killed a captain, called Sacremore, who had dared to ask for his daughter-in-law's hand after admitting that he had seduced her. Although Mayenne had so far shown little enthusiasm for the Parisian League, he now threw himself wholeheartedly into the fight against Henry III. On 18 January 1589 he and his sister set off for Paris at the head of a small army. On the way, the duke won the support of several towns, including Troyes, Sens and Orléans. On 5 February he entered Chartres, which had just risen against its royal governor, and obtained its adherence to the League. Following Mayenne's departure several services were held in the town in memory of the princes of the house of Lorraine. The duchesse de Montpensier returned to Paris on 9 February and was soon followed by the duchesse de Nemours, who, after being imprisoned in Amboise, had been set free by the king as a conciliatory gesture. They were joined on 1 February by the duc de Nemours who had escaped from the château of Blois. The 'party of revenge' was now ready to take over the League.

Once recognized as head of the League, the duc de Mayenne took command of its army, leaving the Sixteen and the general council in control of Paris. They

²¹ BnF, ms.fr. 3422, f. 102.

set themselves the task of enlisting the support of other major towns. Orléans had rebelled on 23 December after receiving news of the Guise assassinations. The royal governor, François de Balsac d'Entragues, retired to the citadel, leaving the town in the hands of the *échevinage*. Henry III sent troops to recover it but Mayenne got there first. As he entered the city, the royal garrison quit the citadel. On 2 January it was Amiens' turn to rebel. A memorial service for the Guises was held at the cathedral on 19 February. As in Paris, paintings depicting their murders were attached to the choir's entrance where they remained till 1594! On 26 January Vincent Leroy, the lieutenant-general of the *bailliage*, formally declared that Amiens no longer owed obedience to the 'earthly king' who had betrayed God and his people. Most towns in Picardy, except La Fère and Saint-Quentin, followed suit. In the south, too, the League soon gathered support. In Toulouse, a ruling body representing the clergy, nobility, Parlement and the *bourgeois* was set up on 7 January. Spectacular processions were held, preachers denounced the royal tyrant and pictures showing the Blois murders were put up in the cathedral. As Catholics in a part of France largely controlled by the Huguenots, the people of Toulouse feared another rising of the kind they had experienced in 1562. Their suspicions of underhand dealings by *Politiques* with the Huguenots turned into violence when a mob lynched Jean-Etienne Duranti, the First president of the Parlement, and hanged his body with a portrait of Henry III stuck to its back.²² Lyons, too, declared for the League for various reasons. A powerful motive was the unpopularity of Bernard de La Valette, brother of the duc d'Étampes, who commanded royal forces in south-east France. The *consulat* rebelled on 23 February, as chains were stretched across the rivers Rhône and Saône. On 2 March the *échevins* swore loyalty to the League and on the 22 March the duc de Nemours entered the city to be greeted by shouts of 'Long live the Catholic prince!' After a *Te Deum* at the cathedral, he was formally recognized as plain 'governor and lieutenant-general', no longer 'the king's'.²³

Unlike the towns, the nobility in general did not desert the king following the Blois assassinations. Clients of the house of Lorraine did, of course, support the League. In Champagne, for example, Antoine de Saint-Pol persuaded a number of towns (Rheims, Troyes, Chaumont and Épernay) to opt for the League, but he failed to win over the local nobility as a whole. In central France, another Guise client, Claude de La Chastre, called on the king and assured

²² Mark Greengrass, 'The *Sainte Union* in the provinces: The case of Toulouse' in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XIV (1983), pp. 469–96.

²³ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 189–94.

him of his loyalty only to change his mind. On 4 April he told the people of Bourges, capital of his *gouvernement* of Berry, that he intended to defend the Catholic faith as the king's followers were allied to heretics. In Provence, the situation was extremely complex. Royalist nobles, led by Bernard de La Valette, were few. Among noblewomen who tried to rally support for the League was Marie de Luxembourg, duchesse de Mercoeur, who helped to win over Nantes on 7 April. The duc de Mayenne was able to mobilize a number of important noblemen, but most of them, even in regions where the house of Lorraine was firmly entrenched, opposed the League. Only in Picardy and Brittany were the parties roughly equal. In total, only 16.87 per cent of knights of the Order of St. Michael supported the League as against 38.58 per cent who remained in the king's camp. Nobles who remained neutral (nicknamed the '*rieurs*') made up the other half.²⁴

On 24 December 1588 Henry III wrote to Pisani, his representative in Rome, announcing the execution of the Guises. He focused on the death of the duke, barely mentioning his brother, the cardinal. 'I was forgetting to tell you,' he added, 'that I have also got rid of cardinal de Guise. You can explain to His Holiness that it has been expedient for me to act in this way as I did not wish to leave a most dangerous instrument of perpetual war among my Catholic subjects.'²⁵ The king's letters were received in Rome on 5 January 1589 but the pope already knew about the events in Blois. In his letter to the pope, Henry portrayed himself as the monarch who had shown most zeal in defending the faith. Now that he had got rid of those who had threatened him and his kingdom, he would be better able to continue the good work. He could be depended upon to serve God even more effectively than in the past.²⁶ According to Cardinal de Joyeuse, Sixtus V did not seem unduly upset by the news from France. He merely said that the Guises should have been more wary as they had been repeatedly warned of the king's intentions. When Pisani offered Henry's explanations on 6 January, Sixtus merely asked him if he could name a prince who had murdered a cardinal. But the pope soon showed his anger. When cardinal de Joyeuse tried to justify the Blois murders, Sixtus interrupted him, saying, 'this was not the way to deal with men of such quality'. They should have been arrested, he added, the duke tried and the cardinal sent to Rome. He then flew into a rage. Never before, he said, had a king killed a cardinal. Joyeuse reminded Sixtus that he had

²⁴ Constant, *La Ligue*, p. 330.

²⁵ Félix Roquain, *La France et Rome pendant les guerres de religion* (Paris, 1924), p. 362.

²⁶ Richard Cooper, 'The aftermath of the Blois Assassinations of 1588: Documents in the Vatican' in *French History*, 3 (1989), p. 417.

once criticized Henry for not throwing the duc de Guise out of a window at the Louvre after he had entered Paris in May 1588. The king, said Joyeuse, had been magnanimous: he had waited for the Guises to mend their ways. Henry, he explained, had only informed Sixtus of his action out of reverence, for he only needed to account to God for the duke's execution. Even so, he did want the pope to absolve him for the cardinal's murder. Sixtus replied that he would consult the college of cardinals and expected Henry to appeal to him in writing. This, he explained, was necessary in matters of conscience; affairs of state could be left to ambassadors.²⁷

At a consistory on 9 January Sixtus spoke publicly for the first time about the murder of cardinal de Guise. A pro-French cardinal said that Henry III did not need absolution as no king had been forbidden by theologians to punish a cardinal guilty of treason. He asked the pope to drop the matter, but Sixtus ordered him to be silent. The pope then spoke of the infinite pain he had suffered on learning of the cardinal's death. The Emperor Theodosius, he said, had been excommunicated for far less. He then exclaimed: 'a cardinal has been killed; yes, killed ... without a trial, without a sentence, without a law, without lawful authority, with secular arms, without our authority or that of this Holy See ... as if we did not exist, as if this apostolic see did not exist and as if there was no God in heaven or on earth!' Sixtus then uttered this warning: 'If we overlook the murder of a cardinal or allow it to go unpunished, the same fate may easily befall the other cardinals!'²⁸

At the end of January 1589 Henry III appointed Claude d'Angennes, bishop of Le Mans, to mend his relations with the Holy See.²⁹ D'Angennes set off for Rome with instructions to justify the king's recent actions. He was instructed to remind Sixtus V that Henry had always been a devout Catholic and had been fighting heretics since the age of 15. He had restored peace to a country torn by civil war and was hoping to reform the state when the duc de Guise had stirred up more trouble and set up a League with the cardinal de Bourbon to whom he had promised the throne. Instead of fighting the heretics, the rebels had seized a number of towns with foreign help. Although Henry had issued an edict aimed at the heretics, the Guises and their associates had plotted to kidnap him. They had seized Paris, but he had managed to escape. He had tried to rally his Catholic subjects by publishing the Edict of Union and had called the Estates-General, but the Guises had packed them with their own creatures who had set out to

²⁷ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 246–7.

²⁸ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 248.

²⁹ Cooper, 'The aftermath of the Blois Assassinations', pp. 417–18.

undermine his authority and to impose their will on him. Guise had pressed the king to dismiss his loyal councillors and to recognize him as his heir. In mid-November, at a secret meeting in Paris, the duke and his friends had decided to kidnap the king. Cardinal de Guise had looked forward to holding his head as it was being tonsured, the duchesse de Montpensier having boasted that she would supply the scissors. The only remedy available to Henry had been to punish his enemies. D'Angennes was to ask not only for Henry's absolution, but also for the pope's blessing, as he alone could extirpate heresy and reunite his subjects. Henry was also prepared to introduce the decrees of the Council of Trent to his kingdom. D'Angennes was received by the pope on 25 February and three times in March but failed to obtain Henry III's absolution. Sixtus even told him to stop telling tales (*bagatelles*).



Figure 15.2 *L'Hermitage prepare pour Henry de Valois*. Two religious figures with clawed feet are trying to persuade Henry to enter the mouth of Hell. Woodcut.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The League, for its part, tried to secure Henry III's excommunication. Its pamphlets were sent to Rome and translated into Italian. The Guises also had agents at the Vatican. One was Jean de Piles, *abbé* d'Orbais, and another was cardinal Nicolas de Pellevé, an old man who had settled in Rome in 1572. In January 1589 the duc de Mayenne sent Jacques de Diou, a commander of the order of Malta, to Rome to give the pope his version of what had happened in Blois. He was accompanied by Lazar Coqueley, one of the Sixteen, who carried a letter from the duchesse de Guise calling for 'Justice, Justice, Justice, in the name of Jesus Christ'. She portrayed Henry III as a bloodthirsty monster who had murdered her husband out of jealousy for his 'outstanding virtue'. Diou and Coqueley were ordered by the ladies of the house of Lorraine to prevent 'messire Henry de Valois former king of France' from being absolved for the massacre in Blois. The Sorbonne, for its part, asked the pope to ratify its decree freeing the king's subjects from their obedience. In April, Mayenne sent another man to Rome who was to tell the pope of the many towns and provinces which had joined the League and to justify his own rebellion.³⁰

On 24 May Sixtus V published a monitory ordering Henry III to set free cardinal de Bourbon and the archbishop of Lyons within 10 days; and to appear in Rome, either in person or by proxy, within 60 days on pain of excommunication. The warning soon reached France where it served to reinforce the League's campaign against Henry III.³¹ Pamphlets appeared describing the awful fate that awaited an excommunicated king. One of them written by the dean of the *Feuillants* in Paris advised Henry to give up the throne and retire to a monastery where he might wash away his sins, but nothing could be further from Henry's mind. Come what may, he was determined to fight on and to rebuild his authority.³²

Henry III's Fight Back

By mid-March 1589 Henry III had decided that his best course of action was to reach an agreement with Henry of Navarre. The secretary of state, Ruzé, was sent to meet him. The chief negotiators on the Protestant side were Philippe Duplessis-Mornay and his brother, Pierre, sieur de Buhy. They met the king at

³⁰ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 250–53.

³¹ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III, roi shakespeareien* (Paris, 1985), p. 692.

³² Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 244, 250–57.

Tours on 15 March and a secret agreement was signed on 3 April.³³ Hostilities were suspended for one year and Navarre promised to use all his strength to fight ‘those who violate the king’s authority and disturb his state’. He was to be given Ponts-de-Cé as a security town in order to facilitate his crossing of the Loire. The Huguenots were to return royalist towns they had occupied, but to retain one per *bailliage* where they would be allowed to worship in public. These terms had to be modified as the commanding officer at Ponts-de-Cé refused to open the town gates. Saumur was substituted after its governor had been bribed. On 15 April Huguenot forces entered the town and Duplessis-Mornay became its governor. As the treaty banned Protestant worship in public for four months, he held services in his house. The truce had serious implications for Franco–Spanish relations. The last thing Henry III needed at this stage was for the king of Spain to increase his support of the French rebels. Philip II was seeking an opportunity to recover Cambrai and even had designs on certain ports in Brittany. He was informed on 21 April by Mendoza, his ambassador in France, that Henry and the Protestants were joining forces. The ambassador had also heard that Henry planned to appoint Navarre as his lieutenant and to recognize him as his successor. Mendoza, who had refused to join Henry in Tours, was suspected by the king of fraternizing with his enemies in the capital. In March Henry had refused to recognize him as Philip’s representative, and he now sent the secretary of state, Forget de Fresnes, to Spain to explain why he was fighting the League and to demand Mendoza’s recall. Philip II received the envoy on 24 May, but only replied to Henry’s message on 18 June. He did so evasively, promising simply to work for ‘the public good of Christendom’. Henry, in the meantime, sternly rebuked Mendoza. ‘I can only consider as hostile,’ he wrote, ‘all that emanates from the place where you have chosen to stay without my consent and which has caused you to lose the name and privilege of ambassador in my court. However, this will not prevent me from remaining at peace and in friendship with the Catholic King, my good brother, which I owe him and have always carefully observed so that he will have no cause to complain.’

The truce, made public on 26 April, was registered three days later by the Parlement and during the weeks that followed magistrates were sent out to the various provinces to ensure that the truce was properly enforced. To make it more acceptable, the rumour was put about that Henry of Navarre was about to be converted. Members of Henry III’s entourage sought to justify his alliance with heretics by pointing to the threats he faced. Potier de Gesvres summed them up in a letter written in Tours on 28 April to the duc de Nevers. ‘For the

³³ L’Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 172–4.

rest,' he wrote, 'the affairs of His Majesty are as you saw them before you left. His enemies are doing everything possible to ruin his state and to endanger his life. Most of his servants have betrayed and abandoned him, his revenues are seized and His Majesty can no longer resort to the other extraordinary means he used to employ in his affairs ... His life and preserving his state are dearer to him than anything else ... The king's cause is just; theirs is iniquitous and based on false pretexts. I hope that God, who sees into the hearts of men, will grant him victory and ensure that his enemies will get their just deserts. The king is hearing from all the provinces that the nobility is rising in his service, and, more significantly, that his enemies are being beaten in every combat....'³⁴

Henry assured his correspondents that he was as determined as ever to defend the Catholic cause. If he had suspended military operations, he explained, it was simply for lack of means. Even so, he was optimistic. A recent victory scored by Montpensier over rebels in Normandy showed that God was on his side. And now, Henry could count on Protestant support. He hoped to be able to raise 7,000 infantry by the end of April. Money was also trickling in. A subsidy from the inhabitants of Angers paid for the equipment of Aumont's troops. Pierre Molan, a former *intendant des finances*, was fined 70,000 *écus*, after it was found that he had defrauded the crown of huge sums. Another positive event was the return of the duc d'Épernon with 500 horse. With these troops Henry hoped soon to be able to confront Mayenne whose forces were now reduced in size. So the climate was favourable for his meeting with Henry of Navarre whom he had not seen for 13 years. This took place on 30 April at Plessis-lès-Tours. Navarre was cordially received by the king; less so by the queen who disapproved of her husband fraternizing with heretics. Members of Navarre's suite all wore the white scarf that had become their badge. A large crowd shouted '*Vive le roi!*' and '*Vivent les rois!*' as the two kings retired to the château for talks that lasted two hours. Next day, Navarre entered Tours without an escort as evidence of his peaceful intentions.³⁵

Mayenne, in the meantime, set about capturing as many towns as he could in central France before Henry and Navarre could join forces. On 28 April he had a bloody skirmish with a reconnaissance party led by the comte de Brienne, Épernon's brother-in-law. Some 50 Leaguers were killed, including a member of its council. Even so, Brienne surrendered, an event acclaimed in Paris as a great victory for the League. Captured flags were displayed in Notre-Dame

³⁴ BnF, ms.fr. 3422, fol. 39.

³⁵ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 238–9; Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Henri IV* (Paris, 1982), pp. 424–8.

and, according to L'Estoile, Madame de Montpensier added a few of her own to enhance the event's importance.³⁶ When Mayenne was told of the meeting of the two kings in Plessis-lès-Tours, he assembled an army at Vendôme with a view to capturing Tours. He launched his offensive on 4 May as Navarre left for Chinon. Most of the royal troops, numbering only a few thousands, were based north of the Loire in the faubourg Saint-Symphorien. Early on 8 May, Henry III, as pious as ever, decided to visit the abbey of Marmoutier with a few companions. As they lost the protection of the town walls, they were set upon and almost captured by the League's vanguard. They managed to shelter in Tours in the nick of time. A fierce battle ensued during which the king's lodging was targeted by Mayenne's artillery. But following the arrival of Huguenot troops in the evening, the duke retreated. Next morning he moved to Château-du-Loir on the first stage of his return to Maine.³⁷

The battle of Tours cost the lives of some 200 royalists and 100 Leaguers. Among the former was a member of the Forty-five who had helped murder the duc de Guise. His body was mutilated after a so-called trial, and his head sent to Paris where it was attached to the gibbet at Montfaucon. Once again, the capital claimed a resounding victory. Pamphlets claimed that Mayenne had killed 600 of the enemy, including several of the Forty-five whose heads would be sent to Paris. In Mézières, bonfires were lit in celebration. But the defence of Tours had only been successful thanks to the timely assistance of Navarre's Huguenot troops. Henry III was sufficiently encouraged to think of marching on Paris.

Henry III's warlike posture harked back to his earlier career as duc d'Anjou when he had led the victorious Catholic armies at Jarnac and Moncontour; but it seems that he was bluffing. He was not really keen to fight. All he wanted was to frighten the opposition into submission. He hoped that towns that had joined the League would open their gates to him as he marched on Paris, but he needed money to pay for troops and in many parts of France, especially in the centre, the tax collecting administration had fallen into the hands of the League. Henry set about recruiting tax collectors in various parishes around Paris. They were threatened with dire punishments if they refused to hand over the money they had collected. Henry also looked for assistance from abroad. Queen Elizabeth I at first refused to help, but in July Lord Burghley began to think of ways of funding the war in France.

In March 1589 Henry launched a military offensive aimed at reconquering western France. The bulk of his army, under the command of marshal d'Aumont,

³⁶ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 180.

³⁷ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 240–41.

left Tours on the 17 March to besiege Le Mans which the Leaguers had recently occupied. But Henry's Swiss troops refused to move unless they were paid. On 1 April Aumont's men managed to hold Angers which had almost fallen to the League. The town council was reorganized and the inhabitants gave the king 50,000 *écus*. Four days later, Rennes fell and its Parlement charged the Leaguers with treason. Elsewhere in France, the king's fortunes were mixed. In Champagne, only three towns – Châlons, Langres and Sainte-Menehould supported him. The League had tried to gain control of Châlons only to be driven out by the local bourgeois. Henry expressed his gratitude by moving part of the Parlement of Paris to the town.³⁸ The Leaguers also met with resistance in Limousin and Auvergne. At Limoges, the notables refused to join a revolt organized by the bishop. In Auvergne, Clermont which had been given a *présidial* court by the king seven years before, remained loyal, while its rival, Riom, adhered to the League. Among towns with a parlement, only Rennes and Bordeaux continued to obey the king. The other parlements were moved to royalist towns after being suspended. In an attempt to retain the allegiance of the towns, Henry announced that he was reducing the *taille* by one-quarter for the current year. He also promised to treat leniently any Leaguer town which returned to his allegiance; but these measures achieved little. On the other hand, most noblemen were royalists. An Italian observer estimated that two-thirds, including the richest, supported the king. He relied on them, especially princes of the blood, to tighten his hold on the provinces. In January 1589 Henry managed to win over the powerful duc de Montmorency whom he reappointed as governor of Languedoc. Later, he promised to make him Constable and offered his son the office of *Grand maître* formerly held by the duc de Guise.³⁹

On 8 April 1589 the duc de Mayenne, who had been appointed lieutenant-general by the League's council, left Paris to take charge of an army at Étampes. It comprised 10,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry and eight artillery pieces. With the addition of Walloon mercenaries, landsknechts and troops raised in Picardy, the League expected to dispose of 20,000 men by Easter. Mayenne, who already held Chartres, Le Mans and Orléans, planned to close in on Tours. Vendôme fell to him in mid-April. Henry III's friends feared for his safety in Tours. They knew only too well that many Catholics wanted him dead. He tried to reassure them. His health, he wrote, was excellent and he pointed to the fall of Angers and other successes. But he needed money. Some of his councillors urged him to come to terms with Henry of Navarre, but the duc de Nevers vehemently

³⁸ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 225.

³⁹ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 229.

opposed the idea. He warned Henry of the dire consequences of such a move: Catholics would be held to ransom and suffer pillage, their wives and daughters raped, their churches destroyed and their worship banned. In short, they would be worse than slaves and legally justified to rebel, but Henry would not listen. So Nevers left the court disgruntled, but he did not disown the king. After returning to his home in the Nivernois, he assured Henry that he would continue to serve him and to suffer all the afflictions God would send him as penance for his sins.⁴⁰

In the meantime, Henry of Navarre, after fighting in Poitou, retired to La Rochelle where he remained till the middle of February 1589 when, moving north, he captured Châtellerault. The League felt sure that the king would negotiate with him, but it was Navarre who made the first move. On 4 March he addressed an open letter to the kingdom's three estates. Claiming to be the nation's defender and the protector of all Frenchmen, he painted a grim picture of France, torn apart by civil conflict. He denounced the men who had taken up arms out of an 'ignorant and imaginary' fear of his succeeding to the throne. His cause, he explained, was just and God was on his side. He only wanted to fight for his country.⁴¹ Following this declaration, Navarre entered Touraine. He got as far as Montbazou then retreated to Châtellerault where he spent the rest of the month. Meanwhile, fighting continued in the Ile-de-France and in Beauce, Mayenne moved to Alençon. Aumale and Maineville tried to reconquer Senlis which had declared for the king but were heavily defeated on 17 May by a smaller force commanded by the duc de Longueville and the Huguenot captain, La Noue.⁴² About 1,500 Leaguers were killed, including Maineville. Aumale sought refuge at Saint-Denis. News of the royalist victory spread like wildfire. At Tours, a *Te Deum* was sung in celebration. On 18 May a force of Huguenot cavalry commanded by François de Châstillon routed some 300 Leaguer cavalry near Bonneval in Beauce, killing their captain. This double setback obliged Mayenne to abandon Alençon in order to prepare the defence of Paris.

Henry III decided to march on Paris. But it was Henry of Navarre, according to the Agrippa d'Aubigné, who persuaded him to do so.⁴³ While the king's entourage wanted to temporize, Navarre urged the king to form a single army instead of dispersing his forces and to lead it himself. Henry appears to have trusted Navarre, who repeatedly assured him of his loyalty. He referred to him

⁴⁰ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 231.

⁴¹ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 232.

⁴² L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 184–5.

⁴³ Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ed. André Thierry (Geneva, 1994), Vol. 8, pp. 48–9.

as 'the Master' and liked to remind Henry of their blood kinship. In one of his letters he wrote: 'I swear before God that I would not love a brother more than you' and 'No one loves you more than I do'.⁴⁴ Henry responded by appointing Navarre to command the vanguard of the army. He himself took charge of the centre or 'battle', and Épernon, who had returned to court in May, was given the rearguard. The king now disposed of 12,000 infantry and 2,000 horse. The Protestant vanguard, consisting of some 5,000 arquebusiers and 1,000 cavalry, set off on 2 June, soon to be followed by Épernon. Henry III did not leave Tours until 8 June. He announced that he would go to Vendôme, then to Montereau, but this was only to deceive Mayenne. The king sent a small force under his nephew, *le Grand Prieur*, to Vendôme, while he and the main army followed the Loire to Blois and Beaugency and on 20 June laid siege to Jargeau which fell after three days. Writing to Nevers, Henry declared his intention to challenge Mayenne without delay. On 3 July, he captured Étampes after a 10-day siege. The governors of Jargeau and Étampes were both executed as traitors although, if the League is to be believed, the king had promised them their lives. It was at this time that Henry was informed of the pope's monitory which may have upset members of his entourage. Relations between Navarre and Épernon were badly strained. While the former was successful, Épernon had nothing to boast about until he captured Montereau on 12 June, but his success was short-lived. The garrison he left in the town soon surrendered to the Leaguers.

Before attacking Paris, Henry III needed to cut off its supplies by occupying Pontoise. After laying siege to the town on 10 July, the vanguard led by Navarre launched an assault which was fiercely resisted. Mayenne was unable to rescue the town which capitulated on 26 July. Navarre allowed the defenders to fall back on Saint-Denis. In the meantime, Henry moved to Poissy, another strategic town on the Seine, after briefly visiting Navarre in his camp. By meeting only briefly the two men may have tried to show that they were not in each other's pocket. But Navarre's superior generalship led to speculation in the Leaguer camp about a possible deterioration of relations between the allies. As Lucinge remarked: 'it is impossible that in the long run the king will not become profoundly jealous of the king of Navarre, for all the soldiers and those who see him laud him, praise him and look upon him as the foundation of their good fortune'. Many Huguenots had been wounded during the siege of Pontoise and Henry III sought to win their loyalty by giving each of them a few *écus*. The fall of Pontoise was soon followed by that of Corbeil and other towns. Meanwhile, at Poissy, Henry inspected troops recruited in Switzerland and the Empire. They

⁴⁴ *Recueil des lettres missives de Henri IV* (Paris, 1843–1860), Vol. 2, p. 497.

comprised 10,000 Swiss, 2,000 German landsknechts, 1,200 *reiters* and 500 or 600 mounted arquebusiers. More troops were expected, including Germans commanded by colonel Dietrich von Schönberg and a Huguenot army from the Midi. Henry III could feel optimistic. He now had an army of some 30,000 men and volunteers drawn from the nobility were joining it each day, but he needed more guns. Paris itself was running out of food as the royalists occupied several towns along the rivers Seine, Oise and Marne. The king hoped that some of his agents within the capital would open one of its gates.

Chapter 16

Nemesis

At the end of July the armies of Henry III and Henry of Navarre drew closer to Paris. On the 29 July, the bridge over the Seine at Saint-Cloud was easily captured by royal troops. On the following day, Henry left Poissy for Saint-Cloud, a town on an elevated site west of Paris much favoured at the time by well-to-do Parisians on account of its bracing air. Pierre de Gondi, cardinal-bishop of Paris, had a house there, as did his kinsman, Jérôme de Gondi, who was a gentleman of the king's chamber. This house, called the Hôtel d'Aulnay, overlooked the river Seine. Its beautiful garden was noted for its fountains. Henry III occupied a large room on the first floor of the south wing adjoining a gallery where the Forty-five were stationed. A secret door led from his room to a small staircase which enabled him to sneak out unnoticed and to receive visitors incognito.

The king was surrounded at Saint-Cloud by a team of faithful servants, many of whom had been with him since his youth. Pierre du Halde, the *premier valet de chambre*, had served him for more than 20 years. His chaplain, Étienne Bollogne, attended to his spiritual needs each day. Other long-standing intimates of Henry were the captains of his guard: Manou, Larchant, Clermont d'Entraques and the *grand prévôt*, Richelieu. Also at Saint-Cloud were two young newcomers: Roger II de Bellegarde, the *premier gentilhomme de la chambre* and Jean de Lévis, sieur de Mirepoix, *gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre*. Bellegarde, a protégé of the duc d'Épernon, had joined the court about 1581 at the age of only 13 or 14. Henry had liked him at once. He appointed him master of the wardrobe in 1587, then First gentleman of the chamber and *Grand écuyer de France*. Bellegarde was expected to follow the king everywhere, but was given no military or provincial command, Henry now preferred to entrust governorships to nobles with roots in the provinces or to princes of the blood. Bellegarde received a pension of 4,000 *livres* and more recently the gift of 4,000 *écus* from the king. Also at Saint-Cloud was Henry's nephew, Charles, the illegitimate son of Charles IX and Marie Touchet, who in 1588 had been appointed *Grand Prieur de France*. He had been brought up at court since his father's death and was much loved by Henry 'on account of his lively mind and courage'. In August 1587 Charles had

been dubbed a knight of Malta at a ceremony that is said to have aroused the jealousy of the duc d'Épernon.¹ At Saint-Cloud, Charles occupied a room on the ground floor of Gondi's house. On 31 July 1589 he attended a concert given by Henry's singers and other musicians. Thus did Henry III continue to enjoy the good things of life, while Parisians were panic-stricken.

The duc de Mayenne had, in the meantime, taken steps to strengthen the outer-defences of the capital. In June, it seemed as if he might try to stop Henry III's advance at Montereau or Corbeil, but he preferred to remain on the defensive. On 4 July he returned to the capital, but his authority was not universally recognized. Many Leaguers looked for leadership to the young duc de Guise who was thought to share his late father's charisma and bravery, but he was still a prisoner in Tours. Mayenne's leadership did not impress. One Parisian complained that he was unapproachable and surrounded by muddle. Parisians were also short of money. They asked for the pope's assistance, saying that they could not be expected to bear the full cost of defending the faith. Meanwhile, the homes of Parisians suspected of supporting the king were searched for weapons.²

Paris at this time was densely populated. Some 300,000 people occupied a space of only 560 hectares. They were enclosed by a wall of mediocre quality that was easily crossed in places. The wall of Charles V, encircling the right bank, was reinforced by boulevards near the Bastille. A number of bastions with gun-platforms were erected near the city's gates and earthworks were carried out on the west side to protect the most recent extensions. Large sums were obtained from the bourgeoisie to pay for these defences. The left bank or university quarter was enclosed by the wall of Philip-Augustus. Suburbs outside this wall, notably Saint-Germain-des-Prés, were defended by trenches which Parisians guarded night and day. Defending the capital was the responsibility of the militia that had been set up in 1562. It consisted of bourgeois who provided their own weapons. They guarded the city's 14 gates and patrolled the walls; but they had lost many men and all their artillery defending Senlis. So, from the end of July, students and clergy were allowed to take up arms and assist in the capital's defence. The League also disposed of 8,000 infantry and less than 2,000 horse. They were expected to defend villages near Paris but, being poorly paid, many deserted. In early June the village of Villeneuve-Saint-Georges was pillaged by Mayenne's troops. Militarily Paris had not suffered much since 1560, but the massacre of St. Bartholomew and the Day of the Barricades remained fresh in

¹ René de Lucinge, *Lettres de 1587*, ed. James J. Supple (Geneva: Droz, 1994), p. 253.

² Nicolas Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu: L'assassinat d'Henri III* (Paris, 2006), p. 275–6.

the memory of Parisians who feared retaliation by the Huguenots and by the king. They remembered how the leading citizens at Étampes had been put to death after they had surrendered. Panic-stricken peasants were also pouring into Paris with their animals as were inmates from religious houses.

The League's army was still licking its wounds after its forced march back to Paris after the fall of Montereau. Its failure to relieve Pontoise was another setback. Several thousands of its troops deserted; some even went over to the king's side. On 16 July, however, La Chastre brought reinforcements to Paris from Berry and the Orléanais. He then took command of German landsknechts who had been hired to defend suburbs on the right bank of the Seine. Command of the infantry was entrusted to the *chevalier* d'Aumale, a cousin of Mayenne. The Leaguers looked to foreign mercenaries to help them throw back a royal assault on the capital. Colonel Pfiffer, the Swiss condottiere, had recruited 6,000 infantry but they lacked experience and were poorly armed. Afraid of being intercepted by royal forces on their way to Paris, they chose to remain in Burgundy. Many also threatened to go home when told that the League could not afford to pay them. Mayenne also looked to Spanish help. He sought the assistance of the duke of Parma, the governor of the Netherlands, and, in return, offered Philip II the title of 'Protector of the kingdom' as well as the right to keep fortresses taken from the heretics. Henry III was aware of these negotiations, but they do not seem to have worried him unduly.³ One of Nevers' correspondents, writing on 27 June 1589, reported that Parisians were desperate. Many supported the king and rebels (*mutins*) were threatening to cut their throats. The people were also tired of the League's financial demands. New taxes were imposed in June to pay the poor for digging trenches.⁴

As Parisians grumbled, the clergy tried to whip up support for the League. Hatred of the king became iconoclastic. An image of him and his queen at prayer which adorned the high altar of the church of the Cordeliers was destroyed and a portrait of Henry, owned by the Jacobins, defaced. Royalists, for their part, denounced the League's excesses. The duchesse de Montpensier was one of its most fanatical supporters. Lame and reputed sterile, she was portrayed by her critics as the embodiment of a topsy-turvy world in which the traditional values of order and obedience were overthrown. Accused of debauchery and witchcraft, the duchess was charged with encouraging preachers by dispensing her favours to them. In his diary, L'Estoile portrays Madame de Montpensier as a

³ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 278–9.

⁴ BnF, ms.fr. 3422, f. 119.

hysterical virago blinded by her quest for revenge.⁵ He shared the contemporary distrust of women who were often portrayed as capable of extremes of violence and refinements of cruelty unknown to men. By feminizing the League, royalist pamphleteers underlined its illegitimacy and barbarity.

Regicide

As Paris waited to be attacked, some Leaguers thought of murdering the king. In May 1589 when Henry was still at Châtellerault, a certain Georges d'Avoy asked for an audience. He offered to murder Mayenne, but the king did not believe him. The man was arrested and, under interrogation, confessed that Mayenne had sent him to murder Henry. Regicide was in the air. Another plot involved two Jesuits, but nothing else is known about this. On 20 June the duc de Nevers confided to a friend: 'It has been reported that some traitors have tried to kill the king, such an infamous and wicked deed, but, as you have said nothing, I have nothing more to say'.⁶ The duke also heard that an agent of the League had been arrested in Tours as he was planning to murder the king.

On the afternoon of 31 July, Jacques Clément, a young Jacobin friar, came out of Paris. Described as 'a small man with a very short beard, a crown of hair shaped like that of others of his order and large eyes', he was in his twenties and came from a village near Sens in Burgundy. After joining the Dominican order there, he had been sent to Paris to study at the order's house in the rue Saint-Jacques from which the name 'Jacobian' is derived. His fellow friars seem to have regarded him as eccentric. One said that everyone laughed when he spoke and that he was considered 'mad and scatter-brained'.⁷ As he left Paris, Clément carried a safe-conduct drawn up two days earlier by Charles de Luxembourg, comte de Brienne. As a young captain in the king's army, Brienne had been captured by the Leaguers, brought to Paris and imprisoned in the Louvre. It was here that Clément had been introduced to him and had sought his help. The friar explained that he wanted to join the king's party. Apparently convinced of his sincerity, Brienne drew up a safe-conduct that allowed Clément to travel to Orléans without hindrance. After leaving the capital, he walked to Saint-Cloud accompanied by some Huguenot soldiers. Around 4 or 5 p.m., he ran into

⁵ *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 Vols (Geneva, 1992–2003), Vol. 5, p. 316.

⁶ BnF, ms.fr. 3409, fol. 18v.

⁷ Pierre Chevallier, *Les Régicides: Clément, Ravaillac, Damiens* (Paris, 1989), pp. 31–5.

Jacques La Guesle, *procureur-général* in the Parlement of Paris, and his brother, Alexandre, who were also bound for Saint-Cloud. The soldiers explained that Clément had an important message for the king. Questioned by La Guesle, he said that he had been sent by Achille de Harlay, the First president of the Parlement, and by other officials who were being held by the League. La Guesle offered Clément a lift on the pillion on his brother's horse. On reaching Saint-Cloud La Guesle questioned Clément more closely. The friar explained that de Harlay wanted the king to know that his friends in Paris were prepared to open one of its gates to him. He produced Brienne's safe-conduct and a letter, supposedly signed by de Harlay, begging the king to trust the bearer. La Guesle said that he recognized the handwriting. Clément then explained that only the king should be told where his army would be admitted into Paris. Under further questioning, he said that he had met de Harlay only two days before as well as two of the king's friends: the abbé des Rivault and Pierre Portal, son of the king's surgeon. He added that he intended to join the king's party after delivering Henry's reply to his Parisian friends. This apparently satisfied La Guesle. Leaving the friar at his lodging, he called on the king, but, finding him absent, called on the sieur de Rambouillet, who was partly responsible for security at court. La Guesle was then able to talk to the king who asked him to return next day with Clément. That evening, as the friar was wandering in the grounds of Gondi's house, he ran into Charles de Valois, the king's nephew. He told him that Brienne and de Harlay had sent him, and that he needed to see the king urgently.

Meanwhile, a note sent secretly from Paris warned Henry III that two monks had left the capital intending to harm him, but a secretary, who received it, failed to deliver it, an oversight described by L'Estoile as utterly deplorable (*'une crasse et lourde oubliance'*).⁸ According to Pasquier, Henry III was also warned by a Parisian lady to watch out for three men who were out for his blood. He mentioned this to the duchesse de Retz, who urged him to take more care of his person as the wellbeing of his subjects depended on it. He replied that God would decide his fate: if He believed his people needed him, He would protect him; if not, he was ready to face death.⁹

⁸ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 203.

⁹ Estienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, ed. D. Thickett (Geneva, 1966), pp. 431–2.

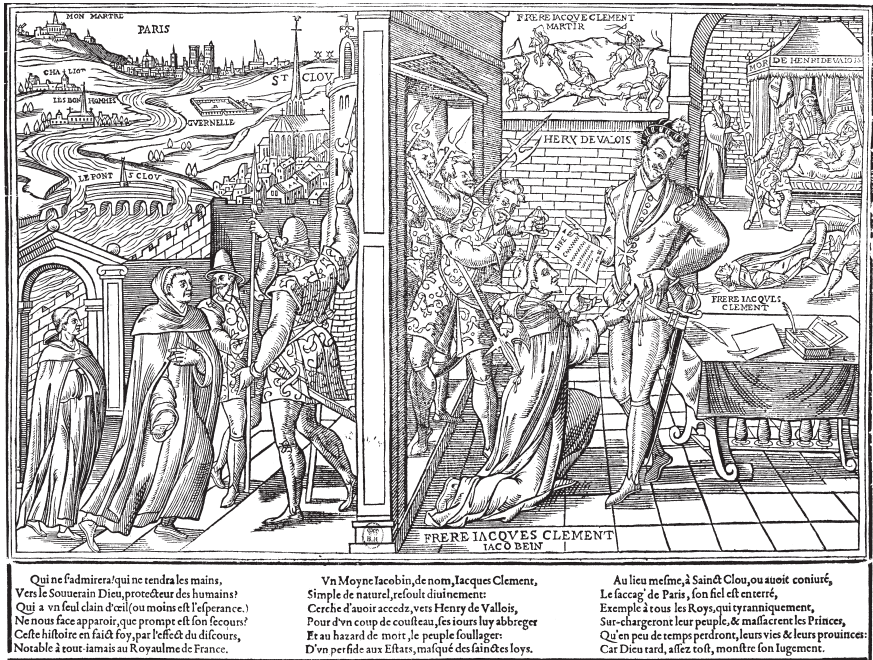


Figure 16.1 The assassination of Henry III by the Jacobin friar, Jacques Clément. Contemporary engraving by Roland Guérard and Nicolas Prévost. On the left, Clément arrives at Saint-Cloud bearing a message for the king. On the right, he stabs Henry as he reads the letter above, the regicide's execution.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

About 7 a.m. on 1 August, as La Guesle and Clément went from their lodging to the king's residence, they ran into Antoine Portal, Henry III's former surgeon, who had joined the court after leaving his wife and son in Paris. As Clément said that he had met them two days before, La Guesle suggested that Portal might ask him how they were. The friar confirmed that he had seen Portal's son in the Bastille, who had asked him to call on his mother. When they arrived at Gondi's house, La Guesle and Clément were greeted by Pierre du Halde, the king's *premier valet de chambre*. As Henry was still in bed, they were invited to

wait in the garden. At 8 a.m. they were fetched by du Halde and taken upstairs to the king's apartment.

According to L'Estoile, Henry was sitting on his close stool as the visitors entered his chamber.¹⁰ Standing beside him was Roger II de Bellegarde, the first gentleman of the chamber and *Grand écuyer*. La Guesle handed Clément's letter and passport to the king. Wearing only a shirt and his breeches still untied, Henry looked at them and, turning to the friar, asked him to explain his mission. Clément spoke of de Harlay; then asked for permission to speak to the king in private. La Guesle and Bellegarde were ordered to withdraw by the king. Whereupon, drawing closer to Henry, as if to whisper in his ear, Clément drew a knife from his sleeve and plunged it into the king's abdomen. Pulling out the knife, Henry cried out: 'Oh, my God!' Then, striking his assailant in the face, he said 'You have killed me, you wretch!' Blood gushed from his wound which revealed the bowels. Drawing his sword, Bellegarde exclaimed: 'Oh! Jesus!' and La Guesle shouted: 'What have you done, you swine?' Alerted by their shouts, four sentries burst into the room. Seizing Clément, one of them pinned him to the ground and forbade anyone to touch him; but guards and servants, who had burst into the room, fell upon him and killed him. No one knows for certain who delivered the fatal blow: some contemporary sources name Jean de Lévis, sieur de Mirepoix. Clément's body was soon removed to an adjoining room and searched. On it was found Brienne's passport, now bloodstained, but not the letter supposedly written by de Harlay. The body was then tossed out of a window into a courtyard just as Charles de Valois was arriving at the house. He found the king stretched out on his bed as surgeons bandaged his wound. So many courtiers now converged on the royal residence that they had to be sorted out by the guards: only those deemed important enough were admitted. Meanwhile, the *Grand prévôt* began collecting evidence from witnesses to the crime.

Henry seemed to recover at first. He spent the morning dictating letters to his wife, to governors of towns and provinces, to loyal towns and to various princes. His letter to the inhabitants of Tours read as follows:

After our enemies had played all the tricks typical of their felony and disloyalty to attain the purpose of their treason, seeing that God out of His grace as protector of

¹⁰ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 204.

kings and just avenger of disloyalty was restoring our authority to their confusion, they saw our death as their only salvation. They also saw the need to give effect to the conspiracy they had been planning for a long time and not to abstain from any action however barbaric, knowing our zeal for our Catholic, apostolic and Roman faith, and the free access we give to all sorts of clergy who wish to speak to us. By so doing they have violated all the laws, both divine and human, and the trust that must be attached to the clerical garb.

This morning, our *procureur-général* brought us a young Jacobin who wanted to give us some letters which he claimed to be from the sieur de Harlay, First president of our Parlement, our very good and loyal servant, who is now a prisoner in Paris. He also wished to tell us something in private. He was admitted to our chamber at our command when we were alone except for the sieur de Bellegarde, first gentleman of our chamber, and our said *procureur-général*. After giving us the false letters, the friar asked to speak to us in private; whereupon we asked the above-named gentlemen to withdraw. The wretched man then struck us with a knife. He aimed to kill us, but God, who cares for His own, not wishing his very humble servant to die on account of the reverence he bears for those claiming to be His servants, has saved his life. He has caused the knife to slip so that nothing will ensue if that is His wish, and in a few days He will give us back our health and victory over our enemies. We want you to know this, not only to make known the wickedness of our enemies, but also to assure you of our hoped-for early recovery, so that you should not be misled by the rumours they spread of our death and to spare you, our good and faithful servants, the pain of learning about the strange misfortune suffered by your king.

Given at the camp of Saint-Cloud on the first day of August one thousand five hundred and eighty-nine.

Signed: Henry and Pottier¹¹

The Parlement, which was still at Tours, and Duplessis-Mornay, the Protestant governor of Saumur, were also informed of what had happened. The king added the following note to the Duplessis-Mornay's letter: 'I beg you speedily to inform the noblemen and neighbouring towns of the above content so as to prevent the rumours being spread by my enemies harming our service'.¹² Henry sent a similar letter to his ally, Frederick of Württemberg, comte de Montbéliard. Writing to

¹¹ BnF, ms.fr. 20153, p. 403.

¹² *Mémoires et correspondance de Duplessis-Mornay*, ed. Auguis et La Fontenelle de Vaudoré (Paris, 1824–25), Vol. 4, pp. 379–82.

the queen, who was at Chinon, he gave more details. The king confirmed that he was seated 'at his business' ('à ses affaires') – that is to say, on his close stool – as the friar entered his chamber. He was able to add in his own hand 'Mamy, I hope that you will soon be well. Pray God for me and do not move from where you are'.¹³

After dictating these letters, Henry received his ally, Henry of Navarre, who had come in haste from Meudon to find out how he was. Henry told him that his wound was slight, whereupon Navarre returned to his camp. He wrote to Gilles de Souvré, the lieutenant-general of Touraine, condemning the crime committed by Clément, that 'hypocritical humbug' (*hypocrite caphard*). He added that he was sure the king would recover. Henry III, meanwhile, ordered his captains to reassure their troops. Nicolas de Harlay, sieur de Sancy, left the king's bedside to speak to Swiss troops whom he had recently brought to Saint-Cloud. Four men stayed with the king: his nephew, Charles, the dukes of Épernon and Bellegarde and the sieur de Mirepoix. Henry's doctors then decided to purge him although they knew that his bowels had been pierced. Their treatment proved fatal as the aperient spread into the abdomen causing peritonitis. About a dozen people surrounded the king's bed as he lay dying. Among them were his oldest *mignons*, Épernon and François d'O, and the most recent, Roger de Bellegarde. Also present were the secretary of state, Martin Ruzé, some captains who had served Henry throughout his reign, and two clerics: Étienne Bollogne, his chaplain, and Louis de Parades, his almoner.

Several contemporary accounts exist of Henry III's last moments. One was a certificate, drawn up and signed on 3 August by all the witnesses, which was sent to cardinal de Gondî, bishop of Paris, and ultimately to Pope Sixtus V. According to this account, Henry ordered his doctors to tell him frankly what his condition was so that he might commend himself to God and seek remedies for his soul, namely the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist and extreme unction. His first surgeon assured him that with God's help he would soon be cured and that within 10 days he would be able to mount his horse again. After an altar had been set up facing his bed, Henry heard mass celebrated by his chaplain. At the elevation of the host, he allegedly said with eyes filled with tears: 'Lord God, if you consider my life to be useful and profitable to my people and to the kingdom you have placed in my charge, then keep me and extend my life; if not, my God, take my body and save my soul placing it in your Paradise. Your will be done...' Henry then said: *O salutaris hostia*. All day he spoke only of God and of the joy of those who die in His grace. Although he had taken communion on 23 July, he

¹³ Chevallier, *Les Régicides*, pp. 391–2.

asked to do so again, but his confessor refused him absolution as he had not yet satisfied the pope's demands. Sixtus V, as we have seen, had demanded the release of the cardinal of Bourbon and of the archbishop of Lyons. He had also asked Henry to do penance for the murder of cardinal de Guise. The king now replied that he had always wanted to live and die as the first son of the Catholic church and was, therefore, willing to satisfy all the pope's demands.

About 11 p.m., as his abdominal pains became worse, Henry asked for his chaplain. At 2 a.m. he asked to be given the last rites. His companions urged him to face death with courage. 'Sire,' one of them said, 'show us that you are a true Catholic and recognize God's authority; show us also that the acts of piety and religion which you have performed have been unforced and that you have always believed in them.' 'Yes,' replied the king, 'I wish to die in the bosom of the Catholic, apostolic and Roman church. My God, have pity on me and forgive my sins!' He then began to recite the psalm *Miserere mei, Deus*, as he had done every Friday evening with his friends of the Confraternity of Death. But he was interrupted by someone who asked him to forgive his enemies, even those who had planned his death. Henry did so before making a brief confession. Only then was he absolved. He crossed himself twice and passed away.

The certificate containing these details was sent to cardinal de Gondî who forwarded it to Rome where the abbé Arnaud d'Ossat was to spend the following years trying to persuade the pope that Henry had never received his monitory. Copies of the document were also circulated by the secretary of state, Ruzé, to remove the taint of heresy from Henry's reputation. The certificate significantly omitted any mention of Henry's meeting with the king of Navarre whom Sixtus V had formally excluded from the line of succession to the French throne.¹⁴ Other contemporary accounts of Henry's last days do mention the meeting and also report that Henry ordered his servants to recognize Navarre as his successor. L'Estoile in his diary states that after taking communion Henry pointed to Navarre saying: 'There is your king!'¹⁵ Pasquier describes how the king, urged by his friends to die as a good Catholic, kissed the Blessed Sacrament before collapsing. He mentions the meeting with Navarre on 1 August but states that the king warned his visitor to look after his own safety. He does not say that he presented him to his entourage as his successor.¹⁶ Most, if not all of these accounts, were clearly written with an eye to the future rather than the past. They were less concerned to give an accurate account of Henry's last moments

¹⁴ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 23–5.

¹⁵ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 205.

¹⁶ Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, pp. 431–4.

than to pave the way for the next stage of the civil war, either by reinforcing the League's determination to resist Navarre or to facilitate his succession to the throne. None can be taken as entirely reliable.



Figure 16.2 Henry III on his deathbed appoints Henry of Navarre as his successor on the throne of France. Tapestry. Musée de la Renaissance, chateau of Ecouen.

Source: The Bridgeman Art Library.

The account of Henry's death that is generally regarded as the most trustworthy is that given by his nephew, Charles de Valois, in his memoirs, but they were written half a century later and the words he ascribes to the dying monarch can only be a reconstruction. Charles tells us that Navarre entered the king's chamber about 11 a.m. on 1 August. After holding out his hand for him to kiss, Henry told him to beware of their common enemies, reassured him about his wound, and recognized him as his lawful successor while urging him

to become a Catholic. Navarre, for his part, wished Henry a speedy recovery. If Charles de Valois is to be believed, Henry then spoke at length about the actions he had taken against his enemies, justifying them and calling on all his subjects to recognize Navarre as his lawful successor.¹⁷ But, as Le Roux rightly says: ‘One may doubt that the wounded man could have spoken at such length and so forcefully, and also that he would have said such things since he believed that he was assured of an early recovery.’¹⁸ But the speech reported by Charles de Valois is significant for what it tells us about Henry’s view of the royal succession. He continued to uphold the Salic law determining the order of succession regardless of religion and implicitly rejected the principle of Catholicity that the League had extorted from him in 1588. Charles also states that the dying monarch recommended him and Bellegarde to Navarre, but this may be an afterthought aimed at Henry IV who denied Charles any role in government and in 1605 imprisoned him in the Bastille where he was to remain for 11 years!

The Aftermath

Henry of Navarre did not see the king again after his visit on the morning of 1 August. He only returned to Saint-Cloud that evening after learning of Henry’s desperate state. Several captains accompanied him. According to Sully, Navarre was received by the Scottish guard and various court dignitaries with the respect due to a sovereign. Early on 2 August he took up residence at Saint-Cloud in a building close to Gondi’s house where the body of the late king lay. Navarre and his captains retired to consider the measures that needed to be taken. All day long, officers filed past the new king, Henry IV, to swear fealty. A council meeting decided that Clément’s body should be dismembered, burnt and the ashes scattered over the River Seine.

News of Henry III’s death reached Paris later that day. It was confirmed on 3 August and publicized by the League’s council that afternoon. Its followers demonstrated their elation by wearing green – the colour traditionally associated with feasts, jollity and a world turned upside-down. The duchesse de Montpensier exploded with joy. ‘Ah! my friend,’ she cried, ‘You are most welcome! But can it be true? Is that wicked and perfidious man, that tyrant, dead? God! What pleasure you have given me! I am only sorry about one

¹⁷ Charles de Valois, *Mémoires du duc d’Angoulesme*, ed. M. Petitot (Paris, 1824), pp. 531–2.

¹⁸ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 29–30.

thing, and that is that he died without knowing that it was I who ordered his death!’ Madame de Montpensier and her mother, Anne d’Este, then went about the streets of Paris in their coach calling to passers-by: ‘Good news, my friends! Good news! The tyrant is dead! France is rid of Henri de Valois!’¹⁹ At the house of the Cordeliers on the left bank, Anne addressed a crowd from the chapel’s high altar. Clerical members of the League did not doubt that God had guided Clément’s hand when he had struck the king. Jean de La Fosse, the *curé* of Saint-Barthélemy, wrote in his diary that the king’s assassination had been carried out ‘by divine permission’ because he had been ‘by nature very cruel and vindictive’ and his heart had breathed ‘only threats and revenge mainly against the town of Paris.’ Another clergyman, Nicolas Brûlart, described the murder as ‘very strange’ because it was unprecedented in French history. No French king had ever sided with heretics before. Henry III, he affirmed, was not mourned by Parisians ‘because he wanted to ruin their town and to avenge the Day of the Barricades.’²⁰

On 5 August the general council of the League officially recognized the cardinal of Bourbon, who was still a prisoner in Chinon, as King Charles X. In the following weeks Mayenne tried to persuade Chavigny, the governor of Chinon, to release him, but, on 3 September, the cardinal was handed over to the Protestants and taken south to be more secure. Mayenne assumed that he would step down as lieutenant-general once the cardinal was set free, but, as this prospect receded, he assumed monarchical powers. He set up a council directly dependent on himself which gradually took over from the League’s council. While its captains tried to raise an army as well as funds, Parisian preachers loudly praised the regicide, Jacques Clément, as a martyr who had delivered the kingdom from tyranny. His portrait was exposed in the city and ladies wore earrings after his effigy. It was proposed that he should be given a statue inside Notre-Dame cathedral. Songs glorifying Clément were composed and his mother was brought to Paris in triumph from her Burgundian village and given money by the League’s council. As Henry III died on 1 August, the feast of St. Peter-in-chains, Clément was identified with the latter and hailed as the ‘first pillar’ of the church. The fiery preacher, Jean Boucher, declared that it was ‘a most meritorious act to kill a king who was a heretic or a supporter of heretics.’ He celebrated Clément in a pamphlet as a new David or a new Judith. A poem portrayed him as a new apostle brandishing his knife in defence of Christ and continuing the

¹⁹ Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996), p. 247.

²⁰ Nicolas Brûlart, *Journal d’un Ligueur Parisien: Des barricades à la levée du siège de Paris par Henri IV (1588–1590)*, ed. Xavier Le Person (Geneva, 1999), p. 147.

extermination of tyrants and heretics begun on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572. The duchesse de Montpensier continued to instruct preachers about what to say in their sermons. Edmé Bourgoing, prior of the Jacobins, preached for a whole fortnight on the theme of Judith liberating Bethulia. He hailed Henry's assassination as a true miracle. His *Discours véritable de l'estrange et subite mort de Henry de Valois* (True account of the strange and sudden death of Henry of Valois) was widely circulated and reprinted in many Leaguer towns. Some 20 pamphlets, published in Paris in the following months, affirmed that Henry had been a wicked tyrant whose end had been ordained by God and that his murderer had died a glorious saint and martyr. Even more influential was the *Martyre de frère Jacques Clément* (the *Martyrdom of Brother Jacques Clément*) attributed to the Parisian cleric, Charles Pinselet. Other works presented the king's murder as a victory over Satan. One identified Henry with the devil whose coming was predicted in the Apocalypse of St. John and whose defeat would herald the coming of the New Jerusalem. The propaganda campaign was also directed at Catholic countries abroad, especially Italy.²¹

While Paris rejoiced, the new Protestant king, Henry IV, asserted his authority. On 2 August he took over Gondi's house at Saint-Cloud and wisely confirmed all Henry III's past servants in their posts. They included the secretaries of state, but François de Montholon, the keeper of the seals, refused to serve a heretic so the seals were handed over to the cardinal of Vendôme. The new sovereign then wrote to all the principal towns informing them that God had given him the crown. He condemned Henry III's assassination and promised to spare no effort in bringing those responsible to justice. It was assumed that Clément had not acted alone. Henry IV added that he wished to follow the advice of the princes and chief noblemen of the kingdom and not to touch religious worship. On 3 August the captains at Saint-Cloud considered their reaction to the change of leadership. François d'O conveyed their terms to Henry: he was to abjure his faith, banish all Protestant worship and reserve all offices to Catholics. The king at first refused, but on 4 August he declared that he would uphold the Catholic faith 'without changing anything' and his desire to be instructed in it by 'a good, legitimate and free general national council'. He promised to call such a body within six months. Protestant rights would be guaranteed pending a peace settlement. Towns and fortresses captured from the rebels would be placed under Catholic control. Henry also promised to punish those who had plotted Henry III's assassination and to protect his servants. Having accepted these terms, the Catholic captains recognized Navarre as their new king. But

²¹ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 312–15.

not everyone was persuaded. As soldiers deserted rather than serve a heretic, the royal army besieging Paris dwindled in size from 40,000 to 18,000. With so few men at his disposal Henry had to lift the siege. Pitifully weak, he described himself as a king without a kingdom, a husband without a wife and a warrior without money. Outside the Protestant areas of the Midi only seven large towns supported Henry IV. Several of his advisers wanted him to retire south of the Loire, but he preferred to go to Normandy. The duc de Mayenne followed him there saying that he would throw him into the sea or bring him back to Paris in chains.²²

There was much confusion in Tours, the provisional capital, when it learnt of Henry III's death. After the Parlement had received the news on 7 August, its members spent four days discussing the situation. They informed Henry IV of their deep sorrow over the king's death and of their confidence in his restoring peace to the kingdom and protecting the Catholic faith. On 23 August he formally confirmed the Parlement of Tours, which proceeded to take draconian measures to ensure the city's security. Meanwhile, Henry III's funeral took place. After his body had been embalmed and exposed for a time, it was placed in a coffin and taken under armed escort first to the Dominican abbey at Poissy, then to Pontoise and finally to Compiègne, one of the few towns in northern France still under royal control. It arrived there on 15 August. Henry IV followed it, but only as far as Clermont-en-Beauvaisis, for he had more urgent business to attend to. On 26 August he reached Dieppe and began to fortify the town.

Henry III's coffin was received at Compiègne by Nicolas Fumée, bishop of Beauvais, his former confessor, who had it placed in the choir of the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Corneille, the burial place of three kings: two Carolingians and one Capetian. The king's funeral, far from being the furtive affair described by Charles de Valois in his memoirs, was attended by members of the nobility and by representatives of all the religious orders, except the Jacobins. Among noblemen present were the duc de Longueville and marshal d'Aumont. At a memorial service for Henry III that was held soon afterwards in Tours a Dominican denounced Jacques Clément as a young man of ill repute, whose ambition had been 'to leave his fame in this world'. On 1 September another memorial service took place at the cathedral of St. Maurice in Angers. The nave and side chapels were draped in black and the choir was surrounded by a cloth of velvet embroidered with the arms of France and Poland and the collars of the

²² David Buisseret, *Henry IV* (London, 1984), pp. 28–9; Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 291–2.

orders of St. Michael and of the Holy Spirit. The service was conducted by the bishop of Le Mans and the oration given by the *curé* of Langeais.²³

Louise, Henry III's widow, left Chinon for Chenonceau as soon as she learnt of his death. She went into mourning by putting on a white veil over her black dress as was the tradition in France. Her chamber and oratory were adorned with funereal emblems in silver: flaming torches, tears and crossed bones. A full-length portrait of Henry III above the fireplace carried the Virgilian motto: *Saevi Monumenta Doloris*. The queen also adopted a new device of box and myrtle with the motto: *Vel in Tumulo*. Each day, Louise retired to her *prie-dieu* after supper and prayed in silence for one hour. She also relentlessly pursued her husband's murderers, for she did not believe that Jacques Clément had acted alone. Writing to Henry IV, she urged him to punish her husband's assassins. Soon afterwards, he ordered the arrest of Edme Bourgoing, prior of the Paris Jacobins. He was taken to Tours to face trial. Bourgoing denied that he had ever incited Clément to kill the king. He said that he would have endangered his order by so doing and that no one in his convent had taken Clément seriously, but he was found guilty, tortured, then drawn and quartered in Tours on 23 February. His remains were burnt and the ashes scattered. A few days later, the Parlement ordered the arrest of another Jacobin and of three important Parisians: the president Barnabé Brisson, the mayor La Chapelle-Marteau and the *procureur* of Paris, François Brigard. A number of preachers who had praised Clément's deed were rounded up and executed. But Queen Louise was still not satisfied, for she believed that members of her own house of Lorraine had plotted her husband's death. Early in 1594 she urged Henry IV to continue the hunt for her husband's killers. He replied that he was waiting for exemplary justice to be meted out to them. After his conversion, Louise agreed to meet him to press her case. They met in Mantes on 20 January, but also Henry IV needed to bear in mind the imperatives of pacification. In March, he announced the abolition of all reminders of the recent troubles in Paris. Sentences passed on rebels were repealed, but the amnesty did not apply to Henry III's murderers. The Jacobins were also forbidden to take part in a procession on 29 March to celebrate Henry IV's conquest of the city.²⁴

The death of Henry III at a time when France remained bitterly divided had serious political implications for the whole of Europe. How would the various powers react to the succession of a Protestant to the French throne? Even among the French there was perplexity about whether or not Henry IV would convert?

²³ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, p. 294.

²⁴ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 330–36.

England and the other Protestant states supported him from the start, while Spain naturally supported the League's candidate, the cardinal of Bourbon. The only foreign representative in Tours at the time of Henry III's death was the Venetian, Mocenigo. Reporting to his government, he quoted the king's last words recommending Henry of Navarre to his servants as his successor and ordering them to obey him. The envoy himself soon referred to him as Henry IV while praising his qualities. The Venetian authorities followed suit. The Spanish government, as expected, took the opposite line. The Spanish envoy, Mendoza, hailed Henry III's assassination as a God-given miracle designed to avenge the Blois murders of 1588. Philip II offered prayers for Henry III's soul while ordering support to the League, both military and financial, to be stepped up. In Rome, reaction to the regicide was more cautious. Sixtus V did not inform the consistory of Henry III's death until 12 September. He refused to hold a memorial service for him or to recognize him as king of France, but did not give the League his wholehearted support. As long as the outcome of the civil war in France remained uncertain, he preferred to keep his options open. He did not want France to break away from Rome in the event of Henry IV being victorious. Sixtus hoped that he would convert to the Catholic faith.

The death of Henry III, the last ruler of the Valois dynasty, was an event of far-reaching significance. No French monarch had been assassinated since Merovingian times. Several had been deposed, but the sacred unction setting them apart from the rest of mankind, had doubtless protected them from regicide. The murder of a king seen as God's lieutenant on earth was generally regarded as the worst of all crimes. L'Estoile described it as 'a marvel containing infinite marvels': in other words, a Pandora's box opened by an irresponsible murderer from which the final ruin of the kingdom would emerge.²⁵ Henceforth the struggle was no longer between Catholics and Protestants but between defenders of the Salic law and champions of catholicity. Since the death of the duc d'Anjou, in 1584 the heir to the throne under the Salic law had been the Protestant Henry of Navarre. The prospect of a Protestant becoming king precipitated a constitutional crisis of the utmost gravity.

A dramatic victory scored by Henry IV at Arques in Normandy on 21 September 1589 served to clarify the situation. Mayenne, who commanded the League's army, had to withdraw after suffering heavy casualties. News of Henry's victory seems to have convinced Sixtus V that some sort of accommodation with him had to be reached. Reversing years of hostility towards him, the pope accepted in principle his readmission to the church. Sixtus even

²⁵ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 208.

invalidated Henry's conversion to Catholicism in 1572 so that he should no longer be seen as a 'relapsed heretic'. In September 1589 cardinal Caetani was sent to France as legate with instructions to pacify the warring factions. But he was no peace-maker: from the start he refused to meet Henry or his Catholic allies. He urged the pope to subsidize Mayenne and to press for more military assistance from Spain. His warlike stance convinced many Catholic loyalists that they had no alternative but to support Henry. France at this stage was a bewildering patchwork of allegiances. While some regions followed the League, others listened to royal propaganda. Everywhere the final decision rested with the provincial governors and parlements. On 14 March 1590 Henry IV again defeated Mayenne, this time at Ivry. Six thousand Leaguers were left dead on the field, thousands were taken prisoner and about 40 standards were captured along with guns and a huge quantity of baggage. On 7 May Henry laid siege to Paris. The siege lasted till 30 August. Altogether 13,000 Parisians are said to have died of hunger. Priests exhorted their flock to face death rather than peace at the hands of a heretic. Huge processions were organized to demonstrate the Parisians' religious zeal and solidarity. Not everyone, however, supported the League. The siege was accompanied by a wave of searches, arrests, fines, imprisonments and summary executions. The prospect of Paris falling into the hands of a Protestant monarch was too much for Philip II of Spain who had barely recovered from the Armada's defeat. He ordered the duke of Parma to invade France from the Netherlands. He did so reluctantly and was joined by Mayenne. Henry IV was forced to retreat. On 9 May 1591 cardinal Charles de Bourbon whom the League had acclaimed as King Charles X died at Fontenay. His death opened the way to new claimants to the throne. Under the Salic law, Henry of Navarre was the rightful king, but he was unacceptable to many Catholics as long as he remained a Protestant. But Henry put off his conversion for as long as possible while seeking to balance the parties. In July 1593, however, he became a Catholic and on 27 February 1594 he was crowned at Chartres and soon afterwards, on 22 March, entered Paris. Six days later, the Parlement was re-established.

One of its first actions was to declare null and void all that had been done against the honour of Henry III in his lifetime and since his death. No one was to speak of him otherwise than with honour and respect. A new trial began of men implicated in his murder. In 1595 La Chapelle-Marteau was again charged, but he fled to Brussels where he died. Some 200 Leaguers from towns in northern France also sought safety in the Spanish Netherlands. Among them was the duc d'Aumale, several of the Paris Sixteen and some preachers,

including Jean Boucher. In January 1596 Henry IV granted an amnesty to all the League's leaders. Mayenne was acquitted of any part in Henry III's death and the parlements were forbidden to sue any princes or princesses on that account.

Henry III's widow was still not satisfied. While welcoming the pacification of the kingdom, she wanted the leaders of the League to be called to account for her husband's murder; but Henry IV chose not to press charges against the princes of the house of Lorraine and their clients. Louise also tried to persuade the pope to rehabilitate Henry III and to hold a memorial service in Rome. Sixtus sent her a brief assuring her of his compassion, but was silent about Henry III's death. He urged her to endure adversity by showing a truly royal wisdom. Louise pressed on regardless. She sent to cardinal de Gondi an account of Henry III's final moments and commissioned a treatise showing that he had not died excommunicated; but Sixtus refused to honour the memory of a man who had ordered a cardinal's murder. He also refused to believe that Henry had never received his monitory or that he had made his confession before dying. Louise continued to demand satisfaction after Sixtus V's death in 1590, but without success. Gregory XIV, a supporter of the League, told her that he sympathized with her grief, but refused to hold a memorial service for Henry III.

Louise failed in all her efforts. The leaders of the League were never found guilty of regicide and Henry III was never given a service in Rome. She also failed to have his body transferred to the royal necropolis at Saint-Denis. Henry IV ordered a memorial service to be held there on 2 August 1592 and an annual mass at Notre-Dame in Paris; but it was Marie de' Medici who, at the instigation of Diane d'Angoulême, ordered the removal of Henry's body from Compiègne to Saint-Denis where it was deposited discreetly in the *rotonde des Valois*, a building that had been commissioned by Catherine de' Medici. It abutted the north transept of the basilica and was designed to contain a monumental tomb designed by the sculptor, Germain Pilon. Henry III's body arrived there on 22 May 1610 when, according to L'Estoile, it was buried without pomp and amidst 'a confusion that symbolized the end of the reign of that poor prince on whom churchmen and monks with a detestable ingratitude had turned their backs and persecuted to death'. After the monks of Saint-Denis had refused to fetch the body, the task was entrusted to some valets who proved more than careless in performing their task. They picked up the body in a bar, called *L'Épée royale*, where it had been dumped. At Saint-Denis, they dropped it in the middle of the church.²⁶ The service on 23 May was conducted by cardinal de Joyeuse,

²⁶ Pierre de L'Estoile, *Journal de L'Estoile pour le règne de Henri IV et le début du règne de Louis XIII*, ed. André Martin (Paris, 1960), pp. 120–21.

but he did not offer a eulogy. A few old friends were present, including Épernon, Bellegarde, the First president de Harlay and Diane d'Angoulême. In 1594 a mural tomb was set up in the church at Saint-Cloud where Henry III's heart lay buried. It took the form of a large heart supported by two weeping figures, possibly angels. An inscription in gold lettering on a black marble background recalled the tragic end of the deceased. In the seventeenth century the chapel was refurbished by Henry III's old favourite, the duc d'Épernon. Between 1633 and 1635 a twisted column of grey marble topped by an urn supporting a heart was erected. Two painters, Jean Taillis and Philippe de Champaigne, were commissioned to repaint the chapel's vault an azure blue strewn with gold fleur-de-lys, the arms of France and Poland and the royal device: three crowns and the motto: *Manet ultima coelo*.²⁷

²⁷ Le Roux, *Un régicide*, pp. 340–41.

Conclusion

It was Henry III's misfortune to become king when France was torn by civil strife. Violence was the order of the day and to overcome it called for political skills which he did not possess. Though he was both intelligent and conscientious, he lacked tact and vision. His sense of humour was also of a mischievous kind which earned him enemies. His conviction that he was God's lieutenant on earth blinded him to the need to take advice and be pliable. He committed enormous blunders, the worst being to order the murder of the duc de Guise and his brother, the cardinal. By so doing, he convinced Catholics, more particularly the Parisians, that he was a devil incarnate who had usurped God's sacred mission, and he incurred the pope's wrath and excommunication. His subsequent decision to ally with Henry of Navarre, a Protestant, seen by Catholics as a relapsed heretic, disqualified him as the acclaimed Catholic hero – the victor of Jarnac and Moncontour – in 1569, transforming him into a tyrant. Henry's misfortune was compounded by the absence of a Dauphin which he interpreted as a divine punishment that needed to be lifted by a penitential assault on the Almighty. This exposed him to the charge of hypocrisy as bouts of self-flagellation stood in sharp contrast to the king's balletic leapings at court. Whereas in the past the French court had led a nomadic existence, Henry's preference for a more static existence in Paris meant that he not only lost touch with much of the French nation but also exposed his court to public scrutiny and to critical abuse from charismatic preachers and scurrilous pamphleteers. Violence among courtiers, such as the *duel des mignons*, did nothing to enhance the royal image, though the institution of monarchy was not called into question at this time.

Henry III is commonly seen by historians as a failure, yet he was a serious-minded and painstaking monarch who did set out to enhance his authority by instigating a number of reforms. His violent death was followed by a change of dynasty: the Bourbons took over from the Valois who had ruled France since 1328. This raises the question of Henry III's legacy. Did anything survive of the régime he had established? As monarchy was to a large extent personal, it seems unlikely that Henry IV would have endorsed his predecessor's reforms. Henry III had sought to magnify royal authority by distancing himself

from most of his subjects, an aim that was given physical expression by the reorganization of the king's apartment and the creation of an elaborate courtly etiquette. Temperamentally Henry IV was as unlike his predecessor as any man could be. He needed to express his tumultuous nature in constant, preferably violent, action: hunting during the day, gambling in the evening and wenching at night. He cared little about his appearance. He used to appear at court in clothes that were the worse for wear: dirty tattered and holed. He became famous for his strong body odour which his queen sought to blot out by the lavish use of perfume. Should we conclude from this that the various reforms introduced by the super-fastidious Henry III to enhance monarchical authority were abandoned overnight following his death? There is plentiful evidence that this did not happen. The strict code of courtly etiquette introduced by Henry III continued to be observed, albeit less punctiliously. The sequence of controlled movements of courtiers from room to room at a given signal continued as before. Ballets continued to be frequently held at court. Some were even given at Tours before Henry IV had conquered Paris. He also shared his predecessor's love of the theatre and in 1599 invited a troop of Italian players to settle in Paris, though admittedly he was at times caught napping through performances.

Henry III built very little. He could not afford to given his many other obligations and the parlous state of his finances, but he did pave the way for Henry IV's architectural achievement. In 1594 the latter ordered completion of the lighthouse of Cordouan that his predecessor had founded, but it was in Paris that his building activities were most significant. Although Henry IV often stayed at Fontainebleau, where he liked to hunt, or Saint-Germain, it was in Paris that he built monuments celebrating his reign. The main one was the Louvre, where work had been in abeyance during Henry III's reign. He erected a long gallery alongside the Seine linking the original palace to the Tuileries. He also completed the Pont Neuf begun by his predecessor and made a start on the place Dauphine (now the place des Vosges). Henry IV has been described as the most Parisian of all the kings of France, but the accolade should belong to his predecessor, for it was he who first departed seriously from the nomadic life-style which the French court had maintained since the earliest times. It was during his reign that many courtiers acquired residences in Paris which encouraged them to stay in what had now become truly the kingdom's capital.

Henry III was a reforming monarch. He sent out commissioners across the kingdom with a view to finding its faults and eventually correcting them, but they had a difficult task given the religious divisions and the civil, often violent unrest, that existed. So we may well ask: how much did they achieve in the long term?

Mark Greengrass has posed the question in his deeply researched study of the Estates of Blois in 1576 and of the Assembly of Notables in 1583. His verdict is mixed: the Edict of Poitiers 'provided a framework in which royal justice was the purveyor of peace', but Henry's agents 'proved, for various reasons, barely able to deliver what the edict of pacification had promised'. There were areas of reform where the monarchy achieved some success, notably the control of monetary inflation, and there were 'some legislative achievements which had a longer term impact on French institutions and the way they worked. The Ordinances of Blois became a model for reforming and codifying judicial practice in the next century. There was hardly an institution in French society that was not in some way influenced by the reforming programme of Henri III'.¹

Much of the continuity that existed between the reigns of Henry III and his successor can be ascribed to the servants they shared. Henry IV was so preoccupied by military matters at the start of his reign that he relied on former servants of Henry III and ex-Leaguers to run his administration. Sully, who was to become the architect of France's economic recovery, was surprisingly the only Huguenot minister to join it. Cheverny became chancellor once more in August 1590 following Montholon's refusal to serve a heretical monarch. Six years after he was succeeded by Bellièvre who had emerged from retirement. Henry IV also retained the secretaries of state who had served his predecessor. When Revol died in 1594, Villeroy stepped into his shoes.

If there was continuity, there was also a sharp difference of political style between the two reigns. Henry III, for all his authoritarian certainty, was too anxious to preach to his subjects. He summoned the Estates-General twice, in 1576 and 1588, and assemblies of notables in 1575 and 1583. Henry IV preferred to ignore them. He held only one assembly of notables. In his opening speech, he told them that he wished to be seen rather as the state's liberator and restorer than as an orator. He attributed the kingdom's restoration to his own military successes and to the support of his 'brave and generous nobility'. By implication the magistrates listening to him were reduced to a position of subservience. L'Estoile described the speech as 'a very fine oration, but brusque and short according to his temper, and which was thought to smell rather too much of the soldier'.² Whereas Henry III had often attended the Parlement in person, Henry IV visited it only once to ensure ratification of edicts in which his

¹ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions. Peace and reform in the French kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), p. 373.

² *Journal de l'Estoile pour le règne de Henri IV*, ed. Louis-Raymond Lefèvre (Paris, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 490.

mistress Gabrielle d'Estrées took an interest. Otherwise he did not trouble to call on the Parlement at all. When the edict of Nantes needed registration, he ordered the magistrates to come to the Louvre where he gave them a fatherly discourse on the need to give him complete obedience. The difference of style between the two kings did not, however, protect them from violence. Both suffered the same fate. A man who was given cause to reflect on the tragic situation was none other than Henry III's long-lived *archimignon*, the duc d'Épernon. Having witnessed the death of Henry III at Saint-Cloud following his assassination by Jacques Clément, he sat alongside Henry IV in his coach in 1610 as he was stabbed through an open window by Ravaillac, another religious hothead. To have witnessed two regicides within a single lifetime must be a record.

We can perhaps leave the last word to the Parisian diarist, Pierre de l'Estoile, who frequently criticized Henry III for his extravagance and burdensome fiscality. He nevertheless offered this charitable verdict following his death: 'he would have been a very good prince if only he had encountered a good century'.

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Glossary

Arquebus An early form of portable firearm used on a forked rest. An *arbusier* was an infantryman armed with such a weapon.

Bailliage The basic unit of royal administration at the local level.

Ban et arrière-ban The feudal levy.

Cabinet A study or small room.

Cabiers de doléance Lists of items for redress drawn up by each order at the local level and supplied to deputies to the provincial or national estates.

Chambellan (Grand) Officer responsible for the royal *gentilshommes de la chambre* and *valets de chambre*.

Chambre des comptes A branch of the royal council sitting with a particular jurisdiction over fiscal affairs.

Chambre mi-partie A court staffed by Protestant and Catholic judges.

Compagnies d'ordonnance The armoured cavalry of *gens d'armes* (hence its other name *gendarmérie*) in which the nobility of the sword served.

Conseil privé The king's council (also called *conseil des affaires*).

Coucher du roi The king's going to bed.

Curé A parish priest.

Dizainiers Officials responsible for the smallest unit of local administration.

Duc et pair Except for the princes of the blood, the *ducs et pairs* formed the pinnacle of the social hierarchy.

Échanson A cup-bearer.

Échevin An alderman in a municipal government.

Écu A gold crown.

Écuyer An esquire or groom.

Élections Courts responsible for the local administration of taxation; also the areas with which they dealt. The officials in charge were called *élus*.

États-généraux (Estates-General) The national representative body, comprising elected deputies representing the three social orders of clergy, nobility and third estate. Under Henry III they met twice at Blois in 1576–77 and 1588–89.

Fourrier A harbinger responsible for finding accommodation for the court on the move. The *fourrière* was the department to which such officials belonged.

Gabelle The salt tax.

Garde des sceaux (Keeper of the Seals) Officer who sealed edicts and royal letters in the absence of the chancellor.

Gentilhomme de la chambre A gentleman of the king's chamber. Under Henry III there were two grades of such court officials: *Premier gentilhomme* and *Gentilhomme ordinaire*.

Gouvernement A provincial governorship.

Grand aumônier Clergyman responsible for the religious life of the court.

Grand' chambre The highest court in the parlement.

Grand conseil A judicial offshoot of the king's council. It became an independent sovereign court in 1497, but continued to follow the king on his travels.

Grand écuyer Officer in charge of the royal stables.

Grand Maître Officer in charge of the king's household.

Grand prévôt Officer responsible for maintenance of order at court.

Hôtel de ville Town hall.

Intendant An agent or commissioner

Landsknechts German mercenary infantry.

Lettre de cachet An order under the king's privy seal.

Lever du roi The king's getting up from bed.

Lieutenant-général du royaume An officer in general command of the kingdom.

Lit de justice A special session of the parlement in presence of the king, usually to enforce a law.

Livre The principal money of account in sixteenth-century France.
1 *livre* = 20 *sous*; 1 *sou* = 12 *deniers*.

Maison du roi The king's household.

Maître des requêtes A senior officer in a sovereign court above the *conseillers* but below the *présidents*.

Maître d'hôtel A steward.

Mascarade A masquerade or masked ball.

Mignon The word meant originally a 'companion'. Under Henry III it became a term of abuse for one of his favourites.

Monsieur Title given to the heir to the throne.

Office A permanent government post as distinct from a *commission* which was temporary. It was often sold and could entail a measure of ennoblement.

Noblesse d'épée The oldest nobility based on birth, medieval in origin and inseparable from soldiering.

Noblesse de robe Nobility acquired through letters of ennoblement, officeholding, marriage, the purchase of fiefs or titles or simply 'living nobly'. Named from the robes worn as a symbol of royal office-holding.

Noblesse seconde A term, recently invented by historians, to describe a provincial nobility, notably in Champagne, that served the crown directly rather than one of the great nobles.

Ordonnance A law or edict.

Parlement The highest court of law under the king, also responsible for registering royal edicts and with some administrative duties. Apart from the Parlement of Paris there were seven provincial *parlements* (Aix-en-Provence, Bordeaux, Dijon, Grenoble, Rennes, Rouen and Toulouse).

Parlementaire A magistrate serving in a *parlement*.

Place de sureté (security town) A fortified town which Protestants were allowed to garrison. Under the Peace of Saint-Germain (1570) they obtained four such towns (La Rochelle, Cognac, La Charité and Montauban) for two years. The number was raised to eight in the Peace of Monsieur (1576).

Police In sixteenth-century France, this referred to the administration as a whole, not just keeping the peace.

Politique A moderate during the civil wars who opposed both Catholic and Protestant extremism and supported the Crown.

Président The presiding judge in a sovereign court.

Présidiaux Courts set up in 1552 between the provincial *parlements* and the *bailliage* courts.

Prévôt des marchands The mayor of Paris.

Procureur A solicitor. Every royal court had a *procureur du roi*, known in the *parlement* as the *procureur-général*.

Provincial estates (*États provinciaux*). Assemblies of elected representatives of the three estates-nobility, clergy and third estate) which met in a certain number of provinces, called *pays d'états* (for example, Brittany, Burgundy, Languedoc and Provence) Called by the king, they met usually once a year.

Reiters German mercenary cavalry, usually armed with pistols.

Rente A government bond issued on the security of municipal revenues. A *rentier* was a person living off such an investment.

Requêtes The inferior chambers of the parlement. Also the place where petitions were received at court.

Sacre The king's coronation.

Salic law One of the so-called 'fundamental laws' of the French kingdom whereby females were excluded from the succession to the throne.

Seigneurie The basic economic unit in rural France. The obligation of tenants of a *seigneur* involved a complex of rights, services and dues. A *seigneur* enjoyed rights of jurisdiction of varying degrees (called 'high', 'middle' and 'low') within his lands, albeit subject to appeal to a royal court.

Sénéchaussée Another name, used mainly in southern France, for a *bailliage*. The equivalent of the *bailli* was the *sénéchal*.

Sorbonne The faculty of theology of the University of Paris.

Surintendant des finances The minister responsible for the general supervision of the fiscal system.

Taille The principal direct tax levied in two ways: the *taille personnelle*, levied on the unprivileged in the north, and the *taille réelle*, levied on non-noble land in the south.

Taillon An addition to the *taille*.

Théologal A lecturer in theology.

Temple A Protestant church.

Valet de chambre A title conferring membership of the king's household. It was often purely honorific and entailed no specific domestic duties.

Vicomté In local government a jurisdiction below the *bailliage* and equivalent to a *prévôté*.

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King Henry III of France has not fared well at the hands of posterity. At best his reputation is as a self-indulgent, ineffectual ruler, and at worst as a debauched tyrant responsible for a series of catastrophic political blunders. Yet recent scholarship has begun to question the validity of this judgement and look for a more rounded assessment of the man and his reign. For, as this new biography of Henry demonstrates, there is far more to this fascinating monarch than the pantomime villain depicted by previous generations of historians and novelists.

Based upon a rich and diverse range of primary sources, this book traces Henry's life from his birth in 1551, the sixth child of Henry II and Catherine de' Medici. It follows his upbringing as the Wars of Religion began to tear France apart, his election as king of Poland in 1573, and his assumption of the French Crown a year later, following the death of his brother, Charles IX.

The first English-language biography of Henry for over 150 years, this study thoroughly and dispassionately reassesses his life in light of recent scholarship and in the context of broader European diplomatic, political and religious history. In so doing the book not only provides a more nuanced portrait of the monarch himself, but also helps us better understand the history of France during this traumatic time.

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